

DELILAH

OR
THE LITTLE HOUSE
IN PICCADILLY.



LONDON: C. H. CLARKE, 7, GOUGH SQUARE, FLEET ST.

PORPOISE LIVER OIL

THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY, GRAND, AND WONDERFUL DISCOVERY OF THE AGE.

FOR the cure of Consumption, Loss of Flesh, Spitting of Blood, Weakness, Local Debility, Loss of Memory, Lassitude, Lowness of Spirits, Languidness, Incapacity for Exertion, Study, or Business, the Mind Irritable and Desponding, Palpitation of the Heart upon the least excitement, want of Vital Energy, Nervous Debility, &c.

All the above symptoms may be dispelled by means of this efficacious and remedial agency. It may well be termed the true

FOUNTAIN OF HEALTH AND VIGOUR,

enlivening and reviving the functions of Life; imparting renewed energy and vitality to the most scattered constitutions debilitated and enfeebled by various influences.

To be sold direct from the Inventor and Proprietor, GRANT McDONALD, No. 3 RUPERT STREET, LONDON, W., or by all Chemists, at the following prices, with directions: Half-pints, 2s. 6d.; Quarts, 4s. 6d.; Pints, 4s. 6d.; Quarts, 9s. P.O.O. to be made payable to the Proprietor, at Charing Cross, London.

Cambridge House, High Street, Fulham, W., March 19, 1884.

To Mr. GRANT McDONALD, 3 Rupert Street, W.

Dear Sir,—I am glad to tell you I feel much better since I have taken your Porpoise Liver Oil. My aptitude for business is as good as ever; in fact, I am a different man, and certainly have to thank you for my improved state of health. I won't fail to recommend you to the delicate.—Yours truly,

THOMAS KENNETH.

[Copy testimonial from the late CAPTAIN WEBB.]

Adephi Terrace, Strand, W., August 15th, 1875.

To Mr. GRANT McDONALD, 61 Haymarket, W.

Dear Sir,—I have much pleasure in bearing testimony to the wonderful power of your Porpoise Liver Oil, as also to your Porpoise Grease. I took a pint of the former during the course of my journey across the Channel. To the use of it, as well as to the onward application of the Grease, I consider I, in a great measure, owe the success of my venture, and this I am anxious to let you know. I will certainly not lose an

GRANT McDONALD, Porpoise Liver Oil Refiner in

3 RUPERT STREET, ST. JAMES'S, LONDON.

opportunity of making known to all my friends the excellence and virtue of your most powerful specific. I think it is incumbent on you, and a duty you owe to the public at large, to let them know by all means in your power the wonderful health-restoring remedy for all ailments you possess.—With many thanks for the service you have been to me, yours faithfully,

M. WEBB.

Merrion Square, Dublin, June 3rd, 1884.
To Mr. McDONALD, 3 Rupert Street, London, W.

Sir,—I am much obliged for the half-gallon of Porpoise Liver Oil received this morning. My wife has been so much benefited by the quart you had previously sent, that she has ordered a larger supply this time, as she intends giving some to the children. I am thankful to say she sleeps better and eats better, and has gained a considerable amount in weight; her cough is very much better, and the blood-spitting has ceased. I forgot to tell you that her father died of consumption at the age of thirty years. My wife desires me to thank you.—I remain, yours obediently,

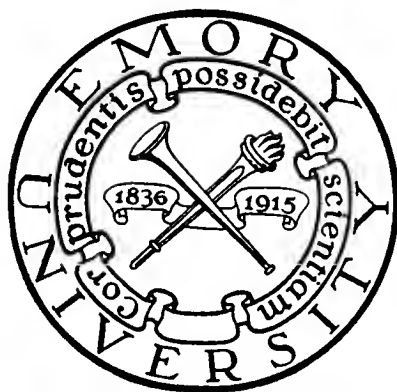
H. J. FITZGERALD.

GRANT McDONALD, Porpoise Liver Oil Refiner in
[161a/164a.
3 RUPERT STREET, ST. JAMES'S, LONDON.]

"Throw physic to the dogs:
I'll none of it."—*Shakespeare.*

HEALTH, STRENGTH, & ENERGY.

ROBERT W WOODRUFF
LIBRARY



e, but wear

L'S AIC BELTS

Restorer"),

IOUS DEBILITY, LOSS
ODY AND MIND, &c.,

AY, showing sufferers how
alth, Strength, and Manly
MEDICINE. Will be sent
s.

etary, Volta House,
xford Street, W.

This is a Positive Cure without Medicine.

BEWARE OF SPURIOUS IMITATIONS.

Patent Rights conferred open to inspection, and
every information given gratis.

Established 1838.

GILBERT KEMP

(LATE WILLIAM KEMP),

CONTRACTING AUCTIONEER,

Contractors' & Builders' Appraiser & Broker,

57 & 58 CHANCERY LANE, LONDON, W.C.

Estates managed for Mortgagees and others.

Distraints personally attended to in any part of the Kingdom,
and all collections paid over on same day as made, or at definite
periods as arranged.

Estimates free for holding Auction Sales.

Surveys made at the shortest notice.

Valuations for all purposes.

Sanitary arrangements inspected and carried out under the
special supervision of principal, and by experienced men.

*All Letters promptly answered and Advice on all
matters free.*

Office Hours from 9 to 5; Saturdays, 2.

DALILAH

OR

The Little House in Piccadilly.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

SKITTLES—LEFT HER HOME—ANNIE—INCOGNITA—KATE HAMILTON—
THE LADY DETECTIVE—THE BEAUTIFUL DEMON—ANONYMA—
SKITTLES IN PARIS—LOVE FROLICS OF A YOUNG SCAMP—
AGNES WILLOUGHBY—FORMOSA—THE SOILED DOVE.



LONDON: CHARLES HENRY CLARKE,
7 GOUGH SQUARE, FLEET STREET.

CONTENTS.



CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE PARTING AT THE STILE	1
II. DALILAH	13
III. THE SUPPER	19
IV. OLD IKEY'S DEN	27
V. THE BURGLARY	36
VI. THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER	40
VII. THE REVENGE	48
VIII. THE TRAP	54
IX. TOO LATE	62
X. CONSTANCE GETS THE ALARM	71
XI. THE HOUSE ON THE RIVER	76
XII. FOUL PLAY SUSPECTED	79
XIII. CONSTANCE ON THE TRACK	87
XIV. THE APPOINTMENT	94
XV. A STRANGE MEETING	98
XVI. THE PRISONER	103
XVII. THE RENCONTRE IN HYDE PARK	113
XVIII. THE NEW HAND	125
XIX. THE WATER-PARTY	133
XX. THE NAVVY	150
XXI. THE DETECTIVE	155
XXII. A DARK NIGHT'S WORK	165

CHAP.	PAGE
XXIII. THE ESCAPE	174
XXIV. A NEW EMISSARY	186
XXV. WATCHING AND WATCHED	193
XXVI. PRINCE POLONIA'S NEW ALLY	197
XXVII. CONSTANCE RECEIVES INTELLIGENCE	205
XXVIII. BLOXAM REPORTS	216
XXIX. IKEY LEVY ON THE WATCH	222
XXX. THE STRUGGLE FOR PRECEDENCE	235
XXXI. FRIDAY NIGHT	250
XXXII. ONE HOUR TOO LATE!	254
XXXIII. IKEY'S REVENGE	266
XXXIV. BLOXAM HAS HOPES	273
XXXV. WALLS HAVE EARS	283
XXXVI. CONSTANCE AND HER FATHER	291
XXXVII. A RAY OF HOPE	302
XXXVIII. IMPENDING	310
XXXIX. RELEASED	320

DALILAH:

OR

THE LITTLE HOUSE IN PICCADILLY.



CHAPTER I.

THE PARTING AT THE STILE.

‘You’LL have your luggage ready, miss?’

‘Don’t you fear me. I shall be there.’

‘I suppose there won’t be very much of it, miss?’

This asked with a covert sneer.

‘Enough to push you out of your master’s service if you’re not civil and obedient. So, if you care to remain where you are, keep a civil tongue in your head, and be respectful to me.’

‘I didn’t mean anything, miss, I assure you, miss; I wouldn’t for all the world. At seven this evening, the other side the toll-gate. I’ll be there, miss. Good-evening!’ Then in an undertone, ‘Givin’ yourself airs already, are you? and all ’cos you’re goin’ to be master’s madam for a time! Lor’ bless my soul, when I

recollect all that I've seen in the same position—fine women, some of 'em, with broughams and villas, and all the rest of it! and this little country-bred chit to think of talking to me—me, Thomas Box, what's been the Colonel's own man for ten years, and seen all manner o' games! It is amusin', on my soul it is! However, it's the guv'nor's fancy, and he musn't be balked in it.'

This conversation took place behind a large fishing-ugger which was pulled up high and dry on the beach of Staithes-on-the-Sea, a little village on the Yorkshire coast; and the speakers were—a tall, thin, elderly man, with a kind of soldierly appearance about him, whiskers now turning gray, but scrupulously trimmed, short grizzled hair, and stiff upright gait; and Lucy Waring, the prettiest girl in Staithes, and the toast of the country for miles round. A strange talk to take place between two such people! Let us see how they came together.

Eighteen years before the date of this conversation the 10th Hussars were quartered at York, the great cathedral town within thirty miles of Staithes. The 10th were the gayest regiment which had been in those dull barracks for years. They gave balls and fêtes and private theatricals; their officers were the handsomest set of men, the richest and the most prodigal; and York had never been so jovial as when this jolly regiment was dwelling in its midst.

Jolly as it was for York, it was a very bad season for its neighbour Staithes. The winter had been frightfully stormy—not with storms which might have been foretold by any of the old salts, who read the weather much better and truer than the weather-glasses and

barometers and 'drums' of modern days, but squally, with sudden unexpected gusts of wind coming down on the calm—so that there had been many wrecks, and losses of life, and nets, and boats, and all that made up the Staithes stock-in-trade.

Matters were bad enough with all the Staithes fishermen, but they were worse with Joe Waring than with most.

Joe was partner in a coble, one of the fishing-boats of that coast, and he had been out with his mate after herrings the night the first squall came down. It was right down upon them before they could strike sail; and the coble turned upside down in an instant, and Joe and his partner Mat Wood were thrown into the raging sea.

Joe was picked up by a boat sailing in company, but Mat was never heard of again, nor were the nets and the boat, all Joe owned in the world save his wife; and she was lying in their wretched little room in the back street at Staithes down with the fever.

The drenching and the loss of all earthly prospects combined gave Joe himself a bad illness; but he was a main strong fellow, and he fought against it, as he would have fought against anything but starvation. But that is an enemy who makes a hard bargain; and Joe and his wife began to think that they would have to starve.

One night Joe and his wife were lying in bed—or rather on the lot of shavings which served them for a bed, covered over with a bit of sacking which the ship-builder with whom Joe had dealt when he had any money had given them out of charity—when a knock came to their door.

‘Come in!’ cries Joe; then to his wife, ‘Nawboddy can’t do us naw harm, lass. We’re clemmin’,* and ha’ nawthin’ left to seize.—Come in!’

‘No light?’ says a voice; ‘no fire?’

‘Devil a bit,’ says Joe, ‘and no claes, and no bit or sup.’

‘By Jove!’ says the voice. ‘Look here, lad; couldst fetch ‘em if had the brass?’

‘Try me,’ cries Joe, jumping up and putting on his old cap.

Then a light is struck by the stranger, who places half-a-crown in Joe’s hand; and Joe runs wildly out, and comes back with candles, and wood, and coals, and some cold boiled beef and bread, and a mug of foaming beer.

‘That’s better,’ says the stranger, when the candle is lit; ‘the deil’s in the lasses, and the lads too, when the meat’s out o’ ‘em.’

When they see the stranger in the candle-light, they make him out to be a man of about fifty years of age, with a thin hatchet-face and a pair of sharp ferrety eyes.

‘Fall to and fill t’ stomachs,’ says he, ‘while I talk to ye. Ye’re Joe Waring, and yon’s your wife; ye’ve lost all in the late storms, and ye’re clemmin’ That’s so, eh? All right! Now, I’ve asked about ye, and I find ye’re main honest folk, and just what I want. Question is, would ye like to ha’ fifty pund?’

‘Would I like to ha’ what?’ cries Joe Waring with his mouth full, springing up and nearly upsetting the table. ‘Would I like to ha’ the Bank of Leeds? Are ye daft, man, or do ye think I am? Fifty pun’!’

* Starving.

‘Ye can ha’ it to-morrow, ev ye’ll du what I ax ye,’ said the stranger quietly.

‘O, Joe man, don’t listen to him. It’s the deil himself; and it’s murder he wants ye to du!’ cried Mrs. Waring.

‘It’s clerk to Burn and Wilkinson, the lawyers in Leeds, I am; and it’s nothing unlawful I propose to ye,’ said the stranger.

‘Fifty pun’!’ cried Joe; ‘I dunno what un wouldn’t du for that. What is it?’

‘Just to take charge of a child—a little girl just a year old. Ye’ve none of your own—I’ve learned that—and this one will make quite a sunshine in yer house.’

‘She’ll hev to be fed,’ cried Joe, ‘and clothed.’

‘Fifty pounds down, Mr. Waring,’ said the stranger; ‘and no doubt her future will be looked after.’

‘I’ve always wanted a little gal,’ said Mrs. Joe, looking reproachfully at Joe.

‘Twarn’t my fault,’ said Joe. ‘However, I dunno what to say.’

‘Fifty pounds!’ said the stranger.

‘In cash?’ asked Joe. ‘I dunno nawt about cheques, or bills, or them kind of things.’

‘In sovereigns,’ said the stranger. ‘I’ll bring them and the child to-morrow. Is it a bargain?’

‘Done wi’ yer,’ said Joe. ‘But let’s wet it. Give me a shillin’ to get a drap o’ rum.’

Next day the lawyer’s clerk arrived at Joe Waring’s room, bringing with him the female child of a year old, and a bag containing fifty sovereigns.

These fifty sovereigns proved to be the foundation of Joe Waring’s fortune. He bought a share in a new

boat, and was so successful that he soon purchased her for himself; then added another and another, and became a speculator and buyer of fish, and worked his own trade, and within a score years was on the high road to money.

And the little girl grew with the fortune, and Joe loved one almost as much as the other. Such a comely lass! such features! so different from the other village girls! such straight-cut nose and dark black eyes and jet-black hair, and such tiny hands and feet! Clever, too, as possible; soon beat the old schoolmistress, and left her far behind; then picked up a bit of French and a little music from the parson's wife, who had been a governess before the parson married her,—and went singing about the place like a little bird.

The folks in the village loved her; only they said she held her head too high. Who would she ever fancy for a husband? they asked each other. And when it was announced that Lucy Waring, as she was always called, had taken up with Tom Weldon the blacksmith, and that they were engaged to be married, there was a talk.

Not that Tom wasn't a fine fellow—strong and stalwart, and as respectable a young man as any in the county, with his heart quite in the right place; only they thought Lucy Waring would have looked higher.

However, Lucy Waring seemed perfectly content; and as the marriage was not to take place for a year—so Tom's father, old Weldon, had stipulated, when he would give up business to his son—there was plenty of time to see what turned up, the spiteful ones said.

Joe Waring kept the Trawling Net at that time, a place half inn, half public, on the port, convenient for

him to transact business with his fisher-folk, and with the dealers in fish, who came from all parts, and made his house their head-quarters.

Some one else came just about then—a tall handsome fellow, who said he was an artist, who had friends quartered in York, and who wanted fresh air, and sea-scenes to paint from; and who was uncommonly fond of deep-sea fishing. Such a pleasant fellow, about thirty years of age, and so good-looking, and so jolly.

‘It’s darned nonsense about he,’ was the verdict of all the parlour-frequenters of the Trawling Net, where he would sit and smoke his meerschaum pipe, and talk and chaff, and sing his song with any of them.

He came for a week at first; but he stopped a couple of months, and seemed to enjoy it. He had a private room—the little room over the porch—commanding a view of the harbour, and the lighthouse in the distance; and Lucy attended on him, and he took great interest in her, and began to teach her drawing, and sometimes would go down into the room behind the bar, where Joe and Mrs. Waring sat, and sit down at Lucy’s piano, and sing the newest songs and play the newest dances. Of course he soon learned the coming relationship between Lucy and Tom Weldon; and he congratulated Tom, and shook hands with him, and called him a lucky fellow, and said that, though he was but a poor man himself, he would do them a good turn when they were married.

And Tom thanked Mr. Jackson, as he was called, like a great awkward chap as he was, and blushed very much, and gave his Lucy a squeeze; which Lucy, Mr. Jackson being present, did not seem half to care about.

After a few weeks, another stranger arrived in the

village—a tall elderly man, who gave himself out to be a soldier retired on a pension, and who took up his quarters at a much humbler public. He was thinking of settling in those parts, he said ; but had come down first to look about him before he decided.

Curiously enough, this last stranger, who called himself Thomas Box, was seen several times in close conversation with Mr. Jackson—not in the village, but where the latter was sketching, away in the fields ; and those who saw them together remembered afterwards that Thomas Box always treated Mr. Jackson with great respect and deference.

Now that we have shown how matters generally stood in the village of Staithes-on-the-Sea, we will go back to the day of the conversation with which our story opened.

At five o'clock on that afternoon, Lucy Waring left the Trawling Net, and walked across the cliff to what was known as the Priest's Meadow. It was so called from having formed portion of the grounds of an old abbey, a few fragmentary ruins of which were still remaining.

When she arrived there, she looked around her ; and in a few minutes the stalwart form of Tom Weldon made itself visible through the intervening clumps of trees, and directly afterwards the young blacksmith was by her side. He took her hand, linked his other arm round her waist, and they commenced walking up and down.

‘What’s amiss with ye, Tom?’ asked Lucy, after a moment ; ‘you seem down, lad—out of spirits. What ails you?’

‘Canna tell, lass, canna tell, Lucy darling. But ye’re reet, ye’re main reet. I feel as if I had t’anvil weighin’ heavy on my chest. My heart’s bore down by it.’

Then Lucy rallied him, and asked him how he thought she ought to feel, if he, a big strong man, were to give way to such sensations?

‘A know it’s stupid, lass, main stupid, and a ha’ fawt agen it; but it’s too much for me. A feel as if summat was gangin’ wrong ’twixt thee and me; and that’s the worst could happen to me. ’Twould kill me, lass, ’twould kill me!’

For an instant Lucy looked strangely at him and shuddered; the next she was pressing his arm, and looking up into his face, and soothing him with words of tenderness and love.

After they had thus walked and talked for upwards of an hour, they went to rest upon a stile that stood in the hedgeway; and there they sat, Tom’s arm round Lucy, and Lucy nestling into Tom like a little bird. All of a sudden Lucy said,

‘That was the chime! Half after six. I must run now, Tom; you must say good-bye, and I must run off!’

‘Run off! You’ll let me see you home, Lucy, as usual?’

‘Not to-night, Tom; I’ve got to go to blind Emma’s, to take her some jelly and some knitting I promised her; and besides, Tom dear, I don’t want us to be seen together in the village just now. I dread the fun they make of us.’

‘Fun!’ cried Tom, a comical expression spreading itself over his blank face; ‘let them laugh as win, I

say. We'll mak' fun o' them in a few weeks now, when we're married and—'

'Yes; Tom; yes; but now we'd better keep apart—I mean before them. And so say good-bye, dear, and let me run.'

What notion could have come suddenly into Tom Weldon's slow-working brain? He turned suddenly, and said to his sweetheart,

'Where's Mr. Jackson to-day?'

'Mr. Jackson!' echoed Lucy, with a sudden flush. 'What ever made you think of him, Tom? He went away two days ago to York, and has not come back since.'

'I'm glad of that,' said Tom doggedly.

'Glad of it! and why, Tom?'

'I dunno; but I am.'

'O, you silly old Tom! was there ever such a curious fellow! There, good-bye; now let me go.'

'You'll gie me *one*, lass, afore you go?'

'O, I don't know. How can you be so silly! There, take it then. Good-bye.'

The shadow fell on honest Tom's face. 'God bless thee, lass! God bless thee! I dunno how it is, I don't half like partin' wi' thee to-night.'

A kiss, a clasp, and she was gone.

'Tell Lucy to bring me down Mullins' account,' said Joe Waring to his wife, as he was smoking his pipe in the little parlour behind the bar, about nine o'clock that same night. 'Mullins is getting too deep in my debt, I fancy; but Lucy's the only one as reetly knows.'

Since he had made money Joe was not used to be

kept waiting; so after a few angry puffs at his pipe, he called out again,

‘Dost hear, wife? Send Lucy down to me.’

‘O, Joe,’ cried his wife, running in to him, ‘O, Joe, Lucy isn’t in her room, isn’t in the house, and I fear something has happened to her.’

‘Happened to her!’ cried Joe scornfully; ‘happened to her? Thou wert allays a moithered wench! Why, what should happen to her? She’s safe to be about somewhere; she’s— Why what’s this?’

He stopped suddenly, as there came a rushing sound of hurrying feet, and a little crowd scurried up the inn steps, and towards the bar. In front of it was Tom Weldon, hatless, ghastly pale, and with his hair hanging round his face.

‘Tom, Tom Weldon!’ cried Joe, standing up, ‘what ails thee, lad? what ails thee? Speak!’

‘What ails me?’ cried Tom, in deep hollow tones. ‘I ha’ lost my life, my love, my darling!’

‘Lost! love! What, not Lucy?’

‘Ay, Lucy, my Lucy!’ and the strong man hid his face in his hands and burst into tears.

‘See here, Tom Weldon,’ cried Joe; ‘I’m no longer a young man, but I’ll stand naw trifling ni’ from ye nor naw one else. What about Lucy?’

‘She’s gone—left us—run away!’

‘See here, Maester Weldon,’ said a farm-labourer, pushing forward. ‘I’ll tell ’ee all about it. Aw saw her. Aw saw Miss Lucy get into gig toother side t’ toll-gate. Maester Box he were in gig waitin’ for her; and soon as she joomped in, he lashed t’ horse, and off they set, hard as horse could gallop, towards York.’

‘Maester Box!’ repeated Joe, half-stupefied; ‘Maester Box!’

‘I’ve found out about ’im,’ cried Tom Weldon. ‘He were sarvent to t’other one—t’other one as were lodgin’ here.’

‘What, Jackson?’

‘Jackson be d—d!’ cried Tom. ‘His name weren’t Jackson, and he weren’t a painter, as he gev out. He were Colonel Clitheroe, wi’ rank and money, and he’s taken my lass away to misery and shame!’

CHAPTER II.

DALILAH.

‘*It is* Sir Gilbert!’

‘My dear Maitland!’

‘I had no idea you were in England!’

‘I only arrived two days ago.’

‘I am delighted to see you, and so will be all your friends. It was only last week that some men were saying at Tattersall’s, that the London season seemed nothing without Sir Gilbert Montacute.’

They were very polite; but I have been so long away that I feel quite a stranger, and shall have to come to you for all the news. I am quite aware, my dear Maitland, I could not come to a better person.’

This conversation took place two years after the occurrence of the events narrated in our first chapter. It was held in the coffee-room of the Wilmington, one of the most select and gorgeous of all those princely mansions—the clubs of St. James’s.

It was not a political club—it was merely a place for social reunion; but the furniture, fittings, and appointments were most costly, and the French head-cook was supposed to be the most perfect artist in his line, and received a yearly salary of about double the income of a curate. All the servants were perfectly well

drilled, and the whole atmosphere of the place was one of unalloyed luxury.

Admission to it was very difficult. Many a millionaire had in vain striven to be elected among its members. It was one of those few places where money was of no avail, but where rank, position, and social qualities were looked for in every candidate.

The first speaker, Major Maitland, was one of those pleasant elderly gentlemen who are so numerous in London, and who, having no business of their own, take pleasure in poking into everybody else's.

Major Maitland knew everybody and everything, was always in good temper, told very funny stories which made the gentlemen laugh and the ladies blush, and was such good company that he was constantly asked out to dinner, and called one of the best fellows in the world.

His companion, Sir Gilbert Montacute, was a very different man. The representative of an old family, a baronet, very rich, very handsome, and of singularly fascinating manners, one would have thought that, if happiness ever came to mortals, he was the man.

And yet he was not happy. He had tried everything, and found pleasure in nothing.

He had, when quite a young man, entered the army; but the dulness of the service became wearisome to him, and he retired in disgust.

Then, with some friends, he started off on a long sporting tour, to hunt the big game—elephants, lions, and tigers—in Africa, Ceylon, and the Indies. He had travelled all through America, and been in some sharp brushes with Indian tribes; had fished in Norway, and shot in Scotland; and was bored with everything.

No one knew what was exactly the matter with him. He was commonly reckoned very fascinating with women, and was generally supposed to have some desperate intrigue on his hands; but it never lasted, and Sir Gilbert was away again no one knew whither.

As the soft light from the brilliant oil-lamp—they were much too refined at the Wilmington to have gas, and nothing but oil or wax-candles was burnt in their rooms—fell on his tall muscular figure, his curling hair and splendid beard, and lit up his regular features, Major Maitland thought he had seldom seen so handsome a man.

‘You’re going to dine here, Sir Gilbert?’

‘I am, and, with your permission, will sit at your table.’

‘With very great pleasure. I have already ordered my modest repast.’

‘Your taste is so admirable, that I shall tell them to bring me exactly what you have ordered for yourself.’

They both laughed and sat down. The viands were delicious. Frelotin, the French cook, seemed to have excelled himself; and the wines were magnificent in bouquet, and iced to perfection.

After a long chat, during which the Major had given his companion a vast budget of news and gossip, Sir Gilbert said,

‘I suppose you are going to the Opera?’

‘Certainly. Grisi sings in *Norma*, and that is a treat I never miss. And you?’

‘I am going too. Shall we come back here, and smoke a cigar afterwards?’

‘I should be delighted, but I have a most particular engagement.’

‘Major, Major, from the way in which your eyes twinkled when you said that, I know it is to a woman.’

‘You’re right, Sir Gilbert. I’m going to sup with a woman, and that woman the loveliest of her sex.’

‘You enviable rascal! Do I know the lady?’

‘No, by Jove! She’s come out since you left England. Fancy my having forgotten to tell you about her!’

‘Tell me now, quickly, who is she?’

‘She is the prettiest woman in the world; the fastest and the most extravagant. She lives in a Little House in Piccadilly looking into the Green-park, gives the most perfect dinners and suppers, drives and rides the most beautiful horses, wears the most splendid diamonds, and is worshipped by everybody.’

‘And who pays for all this?’

‘Well, Charlie Clitheroe is said to have brought her out, but she went the pace much too fast for him. And the reigning favourite just now is, they say, Prince Polonia, the Austrian ambassador.’

‘Ah,’ said Sir Gilbert, smiling, ‘Polonia is rich enough to last some time, however wildly she may carry on. But tell me, what is the name of this charming creature?’

‘I believe tradespeople and those sort of folk call her Mrs. Percy Seymour; but amongst our set no one ever calls her anything but Dalilah.’

‘Dalilah, eh? A very pretty name, and a very proper one for such a woman.’

‘My dear Sir Gilbert, don’t talk in that way until you’ve seen her. You’ll be fascinated at once.’

‘No, Major, not now. A month ago—nay, even a week ago—I might have been; but now I’m proof

against the temptation of all the women in the world—save one, save only one.’

‘Why, this sounds like a romance, Sir Gilbert.’

‘You will think it more like one, my dear Maitland, when you hear the story.’

‘A week ago I was in Paris, in the church of the Madeleine. I was idly lounging about, when I observed a girl of most perfect figure kneeling at one of the confessional boxes. As I watched her, she rose, and hurried past me to the entrance. Her walk was perfect, graceful as a gazelle.’

‘I followed quickly.’

‘Under the porch she was met by an old English-woman, evidently a nurse or housekeeper, who had been waiting for her. As they met, the girl raised her veil, and I was in time to see the loveliest and the sweetest purest face eyes ever lighted on.’

‘That’s just what’s so remarkable in Dalilah, the purity of her expression.’

‘Dalilah? Don’t name her in the same breath with my Madeleine saint!’ cried Sir Gilbert. ‘I could not find out who she was; I have never seen her since; but the memory of her will remain in my heart for ever.’

‘Well, at all events, that wouldn’t prevent your being introduced to Dalilah,’ said the Major; ‘I’ve the privilege of taking any one there, and she’ll be delighted to see you. Will you come with me to-night?’

‘As you please,’ said Sir Gilbert; ‘no woman is anything to me now, save one, save one!’

Half an hour after midnight Sir Gilbert’s brougham dashed up to the door of the Little House in Piccadilly.

He and Major Maitland descended, passed through

the hall filled with servants, and entered a lovely boudoir opening off the stairs.

The Major went first.

He had just said, 'Dalilah, let me present my friend, Sir Gilbert Montacute,' when he felt his arm pressed.

Turning round, he saw his friend staring at the lovely lady of the house, who rose to meet them, while he whispered in his ear,

'Good God, 'tis she!'

'She? Who?'

'My angel! my beauty! my girl at the Madeleine.'

CHAPTER III.

THE SUPPER.

WHEN Major Maitland heard his friend Sir Gilbert Montacute's hurried exclamation, he turned rapidly round and said, 'You must be mad. Dalilah, to my knowledge, hasn't left London for the last three months. However, we will discuss that later. Now let me present you.'

Saying which, the Major stepped forward, and repeating the words he had previously used, introduced Sir Gilbert to the lady of the house.

She certainly was wondrously lovely. Her rich dark hair, dressed after the latest prevailing fashion, was abundant and luxuriant, and was sufficiently handsome in itself to need nothing to set it off; but her brilliantly-white slender throat was clasped by a necklace of the purest diamonds, and her arms were at intervals encircled by broad gold bands, in the centre of each of which was set here a sapphire, there an emerald; here a ruby, there an onyx—each of enormous size and priceless value.

She rose from her seat as the Major and his friend approached her; and after the introduction had taken place, she said, addressing herself to Gilbert:

‘I am charmed to make Sir Gilbert Montacute’s acquaintance. I have heard so much of him, that I already feel this introduction was scarcely necessary, and I am sure we shall speedily become fast friends.’

As Dalilah uttered these words, she shot from under the deep fringe of her eyelids a long lingering glance, which was infinitely more expressive even than her speech; and as she released Gilbert’s hand, he felt the warm thrilling pressure of her fingers.

He was still so dazed that he could only muster up sufficient presence of mind to mutter his thanks for her kind reception, when she said:

‘Supper has already been announced; but the Prince had not arrived, and so I ordered them to keep it back. I am very glad I did so now;’ and she again glanced at Gilbert. Then she took up a small silver hammer, and struck it upon a silver bell hanging on a frame suspended between two gilt cupids on a small table by her side; and almost simultaneously with the sound, the groom of the chambers, entering, announced, ‘Supper is served, madam;’ and drawing back two sweeping velvet curtains, showed a small room, in the middle of which stood an elegantly-appointed round table glistening with gold plate and brilliant glass.

‘Sir Gilbert,’ said Dalilah, ‘I shall claim your arm for this evening; and whatever happens, you must remain by my side,’ she added in an undertone.

Then, raising her voice, she called out, ‘Gentlemen, are you so devoted to your cards and your *baccarat* as to forget your appetites? Supper! supper!’ As she said this, she clapped her hands.

There was a sound from the inner room of cards being thrown down and gold being gathered up, and

some four or five gentlemen now made their appearance.

All of these, with the exception of one, were known to Sir Gilbert Montacute. He shook hands with them, and they expressed their delight at his return; for he was most popular among his set. The last man who lounged in was short and thick-set, with a large black beard, bright beady piercing eyes, and a haughty supercilious expression.

This was the Prince Polonia, Austrian ambassador to the British court.

He walked straight up to Dalilah, and was about to offer her his arm, perfectly ignoring Sir Gilbert, when she said:

‘Prince, you don’t know Sir Gilbert Montacute? He has been away from England since your arrival. Let me introduce him.’

The Prince acknowledged the introduction by the very slightest inclination of his head. Then he again offered his arm to Dalilah.

‘No,’ said she laughingly, ‘not to-night, Prince. This gentleman has just returned after a long absence, and it is our duty to welcome him home.—Give me your arm, if you please, Sir Gilbert Montacute, and lead me in to supper.’

Prince Polonia stepped back as though electrified. For the first time in his life he found his rank ignored—and that too by a woman to whom the world said he was devoted—and a simple English baronet preferred before him.

He twirled the spiked ends of his swarthy moustache, and bit his nether lip till he left the marks of his teeth plainly apparent; but he was too much of a

well-bred gentleman to show his annoyance in any other way, and merely bowed as Dalilah swept by him hanging on Sir Gilbert's arm.

The room into which they went was an exquisite boudoir, small, but fitted with the most perfect taste. Velvet *étagères*, covered with splendid specimens of Dresden and Sèvres china, were fixed against the walls, and long plates of looking-glass were let-in at every angle, and reflected the wax-tapers which, fixed in golden sconces, gave light to the apartment.

A round table in the centre of the room was lit by a moderator-lamp swinging on a bronze bracket from the ceiling, its garish light being concealed from the eyes of the guests by a broad red-silk fringe, which concentrated all the rays on the table.

Dalilah took her place, and motioned Sir Gilbert to a seat by her side at her right hand.

Prince Polonia came up, evidently with the intention of taking this seat; but finding it occupied, he merely gave his moustaches a twirl, looked fixedly at Sir Gilbert, and passing behind Dalilah, was about to drop into the chair on her left hand, when she said,

'No, Prince, I won't have you there! I have a hundred things to say to Sir Gilbert, and your ears are far too sharp. Go and sit at the other end of the table.'

Again did Prince Polonia bow in silence. But the look in his beady black eyes was more expressive than ever, and it boded no good to Sir Gilbert Montacute.

Meanwhile the other guests had seated themselves, and the supper began in earnest.

They were all good-tempered easy-going fellows, leading a fast life in London; one or two in the army;

one a distinguished barrister, the ornament of Westminster Hall, who never was so eloquent as when he was inveighing against the vices of the aristocracy, or praising virtue in rags, but who was always dining with noblemen and their mistresses, and did not practically know what virtue meant; and one or two young fellows, members of distinguished families, who had nothing on earth to do, and who devoted their whole time to doing it.

They ate of all the piquant dishes and drank of all the delicious wines which the liveried servants handed them, and were too much occupied with their own affairs to notice a conversation which was carried on in a low voice between Dalilah and Sir Gilbert.

‘What made you start so when you first came into the room?’ she commenced.

‘Did you notice it?’ he inquired.

‘Did I notice it! Had I not heard enough about you, had I not longed to see you enough, to make me notice the smallest thing? Of course I noticed it. What was it?’

‘Because—because I could have sworn I had seen you before.’

‘That is not very complimentary. My admirers swear there is no one like me.’

And as she said these words she bent towards him until her hair brushed his face, and he felt her warm breath on his cheek.

‘Mine was even a greater compliment; for the lady for whom I took you was the loveliest my eyes ever lighted on,’ said Sir Gilbert.

‘And did you love her?’ she whispered.

‘I felt my heart go out to her at once.’

There was a witching tenderness in her glance, as she listened to these words, which drove him mad.

‘It was you! It was you who were at the Madeleine!’ he exclaimed; ‘it was your lovely face that I saw the vision of as it passed me in the porch!’

‘Was it?’ she said, with a soft tender smile. ‘Well, perhaps it was.’

‘When will you explain the mystery?’

‘Some day, and soon; but not now, before these people. We must be—alone!’

There was one person at the table who had watched this conversation with a fierce eager gaze. This was the Prince Polonia.

Once or twice he seemed as if on the point of interrupting it, but his good-breeding restrained him. When supper was finished, and Dalilah gave the signal by rising from her chair, the Prince was the first to start to his feet.

‘Ah, Prince,’ she said, smiling as she passed him, ‘you will not leave without your usual game at *écarté*?’

‘I shall play at cards to-night, madam,’ said the Prince, ‘only on one condition.’

‘And that is—’

‘And that is, that this *gentleman*’—and he laid a scornful emphasis on the word as he pointed at Sir Gilbert—‘will be my adversary.’

‘I’ll play with you with pleasure, Prince,’ said Sir Gilbert, despite the warning look which Dalilah gave him.

‘For what stakes?’

‘For any you may name.’

‘I say, then, a thousand pounds the game!’

‘Certainly,’ said Sir Gilbert, ‘if you wish it.’

A murmur of admiration at his coolness rose from the guests standing round.

A card-table was wheeled into the middle of the boudoir, and the two players seated themselves. There were other tables about, but they were not used; all interest was centred in the great game.

Dalilah placed herself close by Sir Gilbert.

'I hope my coming will bring you luck,' she said to him.

'There is a proverb, madam,' said the Prince, 'which perhaps you know. It says, "Lucky at cards, unlucky in love."'

'That I should think would never happen to Sir Gilbert, whatever else might,' said Dalilah.

The Prince Polonia turned livid with suppressed fury.

They played three games; the first was won by the Prince, the second and third by Sir Gilbert.

Then the Prince rose and bowed. He went to a writing-table and wrote a cheque. As he presented it to Sir Gilbert, the latter said:

'I shall be happy to give your highness your revenge.'

'You will have to do so, sir, in more ways than one!' cried the Prince, with a threatening scowl.

'I shall be ready to do so in any way your highness may require,' replied Sir Gilbert.

The Prince bowed and passed on. The other guests had already departed.

Sir Gilbert was following them, when he felt a gentle pressure on his hand, and turning round, he saw Dalilah.

'Good-night,' she said, 'good-night, Gilbert; you

will come to me to-morrow at five? I shall be alone. You will come !'

As he gazed in her lovely face, he saw there the exact expression which had so fascinated him at the Madeleine.

'Yes,' he cried in rapture, 'yes, Dalilah, I will come !'

CHAPTER IV.

OLD IKEY'S DEN.

IN the back kitchen of one of the meanest houses in one of the smallest streets in the neighbourhood of Shadwell an old man sat bending over the dying embers.

He was stunted in stature and bowed with age ; but his black beady eyes still sparkled brightly on either side of a large hooked nose, the shape of which betrayed his Hebrew origin. Such hair as was left him hung in long gray locks, and his beard was ragged and grizzled.

He was dressed in a worn and greasy robe, half gaberdine, half dressing-gown, reaching to his heels, and with an old frayed velvet skull-cap on his head.

This was Ikey Levy, the most celebrated 'fence' in the East-end of London, described by the police as 'the downiest, craftiest, cunningest old customer in the trade.'

It was well known that the 'swag' which was the produce of half the burglaries in the kingdom came into Ikey's possession, but they could never trace it to him. His house was a rendezvous for the most desperate 'cracksmen' in London, and many of the 'put-up

jobs,' or planned burglaries, were concocted beneath Ikey's roof.

But though all this was shrewdly suspected, it could not be proved, and, as old Ikey used to say, 'Vithout proof, my dear, nothin's no good.' So the police contented themselves with keeping a watch on Ikey Levy; and Ikey Levy laughed in his sleeve, and did a finer trade than ever.

The March wind blew bitterly down the miserable little street, and came whirling in through the innumerable chinks and crannies of the old house. Ikey pulled his gaberdine tightly round him, raked together the dust and cinders of the fire, then rose and went to the other end of the room. After peering at an old-fashioned watch hanging on a hook in the corner, he returned to his seat.

'Past twelve,' he muttered; 'Dick's late; nothing wrong, I hope! He can't have been got hold of by the traps? O no, he's too fly for that, too fly for that!' He huddled himself up again before the fire, and fell to biting his nails fiercely and listening to every sound.

Presently a heavy footfall echoed through the little street.

' 'Tis he!' cried Ikey to himself. Then quitting his seat, he slipped noiselessly across the marine-store shop which formed the front of his abode, gently slid back the bolts and opened the door.

The person to whom he gave admittance was a short thickset man, with enormously broad shoulders and muscular arms. In the middle of his low forehead was a deep dint, and across the top of his nose was a scar, apparently from some recent wound, for it burned red and angrily. He had sunken eyes, and a great

coarse mouth from which three of the front teeth were gone.

This was Richard Radford, commonly known as 'Devil Dick.' He had been brought up as a bricklayer, but took to evil courses early in life, and after a year or two as a prizefighter, settled down into a regular professional thief.

He was very strong, very bold, and very cruel. Skilful too, withal, in carrying out bad deeds which wiser heads than his had planned, he was just the tool for such a crafty Jew as Ikey Levy to use.

As soon as the visitor was across the threshold, the Jew fastened-up the door as silently as he had opened it, and then beckoned his friend across the shop into the back kitchen.

Devil Dick shivered as he looked at the dying fire, and gave the embers a vicious kick with the toe of his boot. 'That's a nice sort of blaze for a cove to come in to, when he's reg'lar friz through and through, ain't it?' he said.

'Ve'll soon make it better, Dick my dear,' cried the Jew, fetching some wood and coal from a corner of the shop; 'I vos so anxious about you, Dick, I forgot all about the fire.'

'O yes, I daresay you was,' returned his friend; 'why, yer mean old hunks, it was to save yer own pocket yer didn't 'ave a blaze, not for thinkin' o' me.'

'I vos thinkin' of you, Dick—I vos indeed, s'elp me!'

'What was yer thinkin', then?'

'Vell, my dear, you're so late, that if it had been any vun else, I might ha' thought he'd been took by the traps.'

And why not me?'

‘You’re too downy, Dick; you knows too much, my dear.’

‘I knows enough to put the rope round the necks of a good many others besides myself, if ever I was took!’ said the robber, with an oath.

‘Yes, yes, my dear, of course you does; but don’t talk in that way, Dick, votever you does!’ said Ikey, shuddering. ‘There’s no question o’ traps, or beaks, or anything o’ the sort for such a smart fellow as you, Dick. Have you—have you brought anything?’

‘I thought you’d come to that,’ said the ruffian, laughing; ‘whatever you begin to jaw about, you’re always devilish quick in getting round to business.’

‘Vell, my dear, so I am, so I am,’ said the Jew, laughing, and trying to propitiate his rough companion; ‘and quite right too, ain’t I? Vidout business none of us could live—at least, I know I couldn’t; and I can scarcely keep body and soul together as it is.’

‘You thundering old liar!’ said the plain-spoken burglar. ‘You’re rolling in riches, all got through other men’s risking their necks. There, shut up! I can’t bear to listen to such lies. Shut your mouth, and open your hands. Catch hold!’

The robber plunged his hand into a deep breast-pocket of his coat, and pulled out a revolver.

‘No,’ he said with a laugh, ‘that ain’t for you yet; though I daresay I shall have to give it you some day; and if there was any occasion—if you played false, or anything of that kind—I wouldn’t hesitate, you know! This is what I meant.’ And he pulled out a heavy gold hunting watch with a fragment of gold chain attached to it.

The Jew’s eyes glistened as he saw it. He clutched

at it at once, opened and felt the thickness of the case, and chuckled as he said: 'Thick and heavy; fine gold too, fine gold. Where did you get this, Dick?'

'Well,' said Dick, with a grin, 'I got that off an old gentleman in Bishopsgate-street last night. I was coming past the London Tavern, when I see a blaze of light. "What's up?" I asks. "Charity dinner," they says; "Christian coves, and orphans, and all that kind of game." Just then out of the door comes a old gent werry tight. "Cab?" says I. "Yes, my man," says he. So I hailed a hansom; and as he was slipping about, I offered him my arm; and just as he was getting in, I nips this, and slips off in the crowd.'

'Good boy, very good boy,' said the Jew. 'What next?'

'Ain't that enough for you for one night's work?' said Dick.

'Would be from others, but not from you, Dick,' said the Jew. 'Tip-top hand you are. I know you've got more. Show it us, show it us,' and the old man's eyes gleamed with cupidity.

'I never see such a out-and-out old Schikster!' said Dick: 'what do you think of this?' and from his trousers-pocket he produced a necklace, bracelet, and earrings, all of beautiful pink coral.

'Got that from a sailor chap,' he continued, 'off a ship from the Levant. He was in the Blue Anchor as I come home, and wanted to give them to Bermondsey Bet, he did. But Bet was too sweet on one of his mates; so he put 'em back in his pocket, and I took 'em out of it.'

'Good,' said the Jew. 'Nothing very much, but pretty in their way. What next?'

‘Only one more,’ said Dick. ‘A “reader;”’ throwing a pocket-book on the table. ‘There’s some warrants and shares and that kind o’ stuff, as will pay well enough if you can pass them; but that’s your look-out, not mine.’

‘Ah! dangerous paper, and mighty difficult to melt,’ said the wily Jew, looking through the contents of the pocket-book. ‘Worth more than all the rest, if it could only be got rid of. Where did you—did you find this, Dick?’

‘In Tooley-street. He was passing the dark corner by the Salmon and Ball, and making for the railway-station, when I came up behind him. He looked like a merchant’s clerk; so I thought it was worth trying. I slipped up and put the hug on him, went through his pockets like a flash of lightning; only found that and four-and-sixpence, which I kept for myself, and left him unconscious as a babby in the middle of the road.’

‘Always the same,’ said the Jew; ‘the greatest trouble and the least result. However, in they goes!’ and he pulled open a drawer of the dresser, and locked the articles into it. ‘I’ll see what they can fetch, and you shall have your regulars out of it, Dick, as you always have had, fair and true. Now then, to talk about this other matter.’

‘I must wet it, Ikey; I can’t go palavering on here any longer with a throat like a lime-kiln. Give me something to drink, or I shall choke.’

The Jew laughed and nodded, went into the front shop, and returned with a bottle of gin, a pitcher of water, and a couple of earthenware mugs, and placed these on the table before his companion. Dick having brewed himself a stiff glass of grog, and filled and lit

a short black pipe which he took from his pocket, said, 'Now I'm in a better humour to listen : fire away !'

'The house at Richmond, Dick ; that's what I want to talk to you about.'

'O, ah, I recollect ! Well, what have you made of it ?'

'Just as good as I said. Large oak plate-chest kept upstairs under the old woman's bed. Such candlesticks, and sconces, and branches, and ladles ! such christening-cups and presentation-plate ! Make your mouth water even, to say the least of it.'

'What men about ?'

'Old butler and two flunkies. Only one old gent belonging to the family.'

'Any out-door people ?'

'Coachman and two grooms in the stable—a long way from the house. Lies down in Twickenham meadows, far away from anything else. Alarm-bell in the roof ; but rope frayed, and would break at the least touch.'

'Good ! So far you know all about it. How about getting in ?'

'Bars, bolts, and bells to all the shutters, all except in one place, a little conservatory off the dining-room, where you can go through as easily as a hot knife goes through a pat of butter.'

'Sounds well—very well indeed,' said Devil Dick ; 'it will require nice working, though. Who's to be in it besides me ?'

'I was thinking of Sledgehammer Tom,' said the Jew ; 'he's made all these first inquiries ; and for a neat bit of ironmongery work there's not his match in the profession.'

‘Is it that cove I saw when I was here last?’ asked Dick. ‘On the lush he seemed to me, shaky and muddled, and out of sorts.’

‘So he is, my boy, sometimes; but he soon gets better; and if it hadn’t been for the drink, we should never have had him as one of us.’

‘How was that?’ asked Dick.

‘He was in love, my dear; in love with a pretty little girl, and going to be married to her; and she threw him over, and ran off with a swell.’

‘O, that’s how Sledgehammer Tom came to grief?’

‘Yes. He couldn’t bear it, and took to drinking to drown his troubles, and then got out of work, and came up to London, and I got hold of him; and finding he was a clever fellow, gave him plenty to do—plenty to do, my dear.’

‘Can he be easily found?’ said Dick. ‘I should like to ask him a few questions about this Richmond crib.’

‘Easily found?’ said the Jew; ‘he’s within hail at this instant.’

‘Where?’

‘Asleep upstairs. I always keep my hawks on my own perch—it’s safest,’ said the Jew. ‘Not that you will make much out of Tom just now; he’s scarcely slept off his last booze.’

He opened the back-kitchen door, and went to the foot of the staircase, where he gave a low whistle. This he repeated thrice; then a voice was heard to say in thick accents,

‘What is it?’

‘Come down, Tom,’ said the Jew; ‘I want a word with you.’

A few minutes after, there slouched into the room

a man who was yet young, but who looked much older than his age, with unkempt hair and matted beard and bloodshot eyes.

Ah, who would have recognised in him the once handsome, fresh looking Tom Weldon, the stalwart blacksmith of Staithes-on-the-Sea?

CHAPTER V.

THE BURGLARY.

‘My darling Constance, it is indeed a pleasure to me to see you sitting opposite to me once again.’

‘I am sure, papa, you cannot be half so pleased to have me here, as I am to come back.’

‘That is pleasant hearing for me, but scarcely credible, my child. This old house, almost within the suburbs of London, yet so utterly removed from its pleasures, must seem dull indeed to one who has passed the last twelve months in Paris.’

‘In Paris! Yes, dear papa; I daresay Paris itself is gay enough to some people, but at aunt Louisa’s one might as well be at the bottom of the Seine.’

‘Your aunt is not very lively, I know, Constance.’

‘Lively, papa! She never moves out of the house. I was left entirely to my own resources; and if I had not done Paris thoroughly—Tuileries, Madeleine, Louvre, boulevards, bridges, quays, cathedrals—I should have perished of dulness.’

‘Louisa never was remarkable for her gaiety, and she forgets that young people require amusement, which she has long since forgotten. I trust, however, you did not take Katherine into this whirl of excitement which you have just described.’

‘Now you are laughing at me, papa; I did take

Katherine ; and much as she was astonished at all the foreign ways, she took as much care of me as she always has done since we lost dear mamma.'

This conversation was held in the library of a large old-fashioned house standing in Twickenham meadows. General Brailsford and his daughter Constance were the speakers. He, a man of some fifty years of age ; she, a lovely girl of twenty. The talk took place on the night of her arrival from abroad, where she had been spending several months.

Her mother had died some five or six years before ; and as the General had no son, Constance was the only one left to share his solitude.

He loved her as the apple of his eye, was constantly solicitous about her health, and there was no whim of hers which he would not readily indulge.

And he had reason to be proud of her ; for no lovelier girl could the broad counties of England, so fertile in female loveliness, produce.

The General was a remarkably handsome man, and in his daughter all his regularity of features was reproduced and softened.

Indeed, perhaps the greatest charm of her appearance was its perfect classical simplicity. Her hair, instead of being frizzed or puffed, or bechignoned after the fashion of the period, was dressed in plain bands close to her face, showing the beautiful proportions of her statuesque head ; while her dress was of the simplest and yet most becoming make.

'I hope it won't be dull for you here, child,' said the General after a pause. 'We're very quiet, and I'm an old stupid fellow now, though once I heard the chimes at midnight with the best of them.'

‘You must have been an extremely naughty gay man, papa, from what I’ve heard,’ said Constance, laughing.

‘Why, what have you heard, child?’ asked the General.

‘I met a Colonel Daubeney in Paris,’ said Constance, ‘and he paid me many compliments ; and when he heard who I was, said I was quite worthy to be the daughter of Handsome Jack Brailsford, as he said they used to call you when he was quartered with you in York ever so many years ago, and when you drove tandems and went to masquerades, and had cock-fights, and led a dreadful life, you wicked papa !’

‘Daubeney ! Dick Daubeney of the 10th Hussars, who tried to ride his mare Lady Jane up the walls of York ? I recollect him well !’ cried the General. ‘Ah, those bygone days, those bygone days !’

‘You must not begin talking of them, papa, or I shall never get to bed,’ said Constance. ‘How the dogs are barking ! By the way what has made them so excited ? As I came in this afternoon, I noticed both Lion and Sultan with their jaws covered with foam, and their eyes rolling in their heads.’

‘There have been some tramps about for the last two days, my dear, and the dogs can’t bear them. However, that’s no matter ! You’re tired, Constance, and must need rest. I will see you to your room.’

She could not sleep. Whether it was the novelty of her position there, as mistress in her own house, or the intense quiet after the roar and bustle of a crowded city, she knew not ; but slumber fled from her eyelids. She lit her candle, took up a book, and tried to read. For some time she managed to fix her attention ; then she

found it wandering, laid down the book, and closed her eyes.

What was that prolonged howl, that ceased so suddenly? Was it fancy?

She started up in bed, and listened attentively,

No farther howling, but a subdued grating sound. Then a smothered crash, as of broken glass.

Somebody must be breaking into the house. Constance determined at once to arouse her father, who slept on the other side of the landing. She slipped on her dressing-gown, took her candle, and made for the door.

So much for the inside of the house. Outside Devil Dick and Sledgehammer Tom had been working bravely. Strength was Dick's, but skill was Tom's, and the conservatory door had yielded, and Tom was through, and in the dining-room.

The door here was locked on the outside; but Tom Weldon had picked too many locks in the old time at Staithes, legitimately then, for fishermen who had lost keys of lockers and boxes, not to be able to manage that. Two turns of the wrist did it, and the door was open.

Dick was to remain downstairs on guard; Tom was to go up, and prepare the way for his friend.

Up he went, silently, noiselessly, up to the first landing.

There he put his dark-lantern on the floor, and was about to try the handles, when suddenly a door in front of him opened, and out came a female figure bearing a candle.

Tom gave one glance at it, then shrieked,

'My God! Lucy!—my love, Lucy!' and fell backwards.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

ON the morning after the supper at Dalilah's, the first thoughts that came into Sir Gilbert Montacute's mind were those of pleasure at his experiences of the previous night.

In what a wonderful manner had he again been brought face to face with the lovely vision which had so fully possessed his mind after the meeting at the Madeleine !

For it was she ! Though she had not owned it herself, or only half vaguely, and though Major Maitland persisted in its being impossible, there could not be another face so charmingly pure, another form so perfectly moulded.

And she loved him !

Accustomed as he was to the wiles of women—and though yet young, he had known what it was to quench the consuming love-fever in long draughts of bliss under various skies—he had never yet seen such thoroughly rapt devotion gleaming in any woman's eyes as in those of his hostess of the previous night.

‘It was a sudden smite,’ said Sir Gilbert to himself, as, enveloped in his dressing-gown, he lay completely back in his chair, while his valet was performing upon

him with the hair-brushes,—‘it was a sudden smite, and altogether remarkable in an Englishwoman. In a daughter of one of the ducal houses of Venice or in a Roman contadina, in a Spanish donna or a South-American half-caste, one looks for these violent emotions, these sudden impulsive expressions. But the ladies of our northern climate are seldom wont to allow their feelings thus to run away with them; and ordinarily my knowledge of the world and experiences of such matters would lead me to distrust the half-murmured confession that my love is reciprocated, which I heard last night.

‘There can, however, be no mistake in this instance. Women can control their tongues and make them obedient to their will, they can teach their glances to express what their hearts certainly do not feel; but there are few of them indeed who can sufficiently school their eyes to repress expression of sentiments then thrilling every fibre of their being.

‘And she is not one of these! Never was a face seen so thoroughly void of guile. In the holy sanctity of the Madeleine she looked like one of the angels descended from the painted window; and the feverish and worldly surroundings of last night only served to set-off the exquisite purity of her beauty.’

Pondering over these adventures, and consoling himself with the thought that at five of that afternoon he was to be admitted to a *tête-à-tête* interview with his enslaver, Sir Gilbert leisurely finished his toilette, and descended to the breakfast-room.

He was still trifling with the remnants of some Strasbourg pie, which his refined palate highly appreciated, when the servant announced Major Maitland.

The next instant the gallant Major, clean, fresh, erect as a dart, with his moustaches highly waxed, and his boots highly varnished, strode into the room.

‘Good-morning, my dear Sir Gilbert. Glad to find you up already.’

‘Already, my dear Major? You forget that I have been for months away from London civilisation, and consequently obeying the dictates of health and nature.’

‘You will soon get into our wicked ways,’ said the Major with a laugh; ‘and I confess I never saw any one take more kindly or more quickly to what certainly cannot be called healthful, however natural it might be—I mean the amusement of last night.’

‘Well, I confess I enjoyed myself,’ said Sir Gilbert.

‘Enjoyed yourself!’ laughed the Major; ‘how very extraordinary! Here is a man with the prettiest woman in London throwing herself at his head—a woman, mind, whom he has met before in some unaccountable manner, he says, and of whom he is desperately enamoured, and then he is good enough to say that he has enjoyed himself!’

‘You take too roseate a view of things, Major,’ said Sir Gilbert; ‘the lady—’

‘My dear fellow,’ cried the Major, interrupting, ‘it is necessary that somebody should take a roseate view of them, for there is one person at least who is looking at them through the blackest of glasses.’

‘And that is—’

‘That is Prince Polonia, representative of his Imperial Majesty of Austria at the British Court. I never saw a man with such a diabolical expression on his face as his wore last night.’

‘I thought I noticed he looked uncomfortable. What can possibly have annoyed him?’

‘My dear fellow, you are really too much! You give a man a most violent blow in the face, and then wonder he is annoyed.’

‘A blow! I gave him no blow!’

‘Not on his face, my dear Gilbert, but to his pride, which is much worse. Why, for the last few months he has been all-powerful with Dalilah, and last night she would not vouchsafe him a word!’

‘And you think he looks upon that as my fault?’

‘I think he will make you pay for it in one way or another.’

‘There is but one way. He will challenge me, I suppose.’

‘And you will accept his challenge?’

‘Certainly.’

‘What! for a woman like Dalilah?’

Sir Gilbert pressed his hand to his head.

‘I forgot,’ said he; ‘there is to me some mysterious twofold life about that woman which you cannot comprehend. You know her but as—’

‘But as Dalilah of the Little House in Piccadilly. It would be impossible for you to meet him on her account.’

‘Then your well-meant anxiety for me may be considered at an end?’ said Sir Gilbert, smiling.

Not at all,’ said the Major. ‘The Prince would be equally averse with you to letting our fair friend be known as the cause of any encounter between you; but he will find other occasions of fixing a quarrel upon you, even if he does not resort to more unscrupulous means.’

‘More unscrupulous means! I do not understand you!’

‘My dear fellow, the Prince Polonia, though his family has been naturalised in Austria for many years, is of Corsican extraction, and is as bloodthirsty and revengeful as any of his countrymen.’

‘What would you have me gather from this?’

‘Simply to be on your guard where the Prince is concerned. He would let nothing stand between him and the object of his revenge; and I honestly confess I did not like the glances which he shot out from under his overhanging eyebrows at you last night.’

‘I am deeply indebted to you for your warning, my dear friend,’ said Sir Gilbert with a pleasant smile; ‘but I do not think there is much to stand in fear of.’

‘This Prince is a good pistol-shot. I recollect hearing of his prowess in the galleries at Vienna.’

‘But you know that I too am tolerably sure with that weapon; and as for any underhand tricks, why, we live in London in the nineteenth century, and have Scotland-yard and the gentlemen in blue to take care of us.’

‘Well, as you please,’ said the Major; ‘only recollect, I speak as a man of the world. Now, are you for a turn in the Row before luncheon? My horse is at the door.’

Sir Gilbert rang the bell and ordered his horse; and in a few minutes the gentlemen were riding side by side towards the Park.

The Row was filled; rank, beauty, and fashion were there. Young girls, yet bearing the roses of country-life in which they had been nurtured, but which they were soon to exchange for the waxy complexions brought

on by late hours and dissipation; young women just ripening from girlhood to womanhood, retaining the freshness of the one with the luxuriant beauty of the other.

And some women, alas, who had both youth and beauty, and who had made a market of both, and flaunted, careering through the crowd with hollow eyes and painted cheeks.

Time was when Sir Gilbert Montacute would have had something to say to nine-tenths of the women present; for even for the fallen ones he had always a word of tenderness and compassion.

But now the remembrance of one face filled his soul, but one voice alone could make music in his ear; and he rode slowly through the crowd, bowing with a grave smile of courtesy to everybody, but speaking to none.

Major Maitland found his companion very trying.

To cut-off the Major's gossip was as bad as depriving him of his champagne at dinner, or of his cigar afterwards.

When he found Sir Gilbert bent upon silence, he made some excuse, and turning his hack's head, was soon engaged in pleasant conversation and the discussion of the latest topic of club-scandal with a party of laughing friends.

'What the deuce has come to Montacute!' said one of them, as, carelessly leaning back in their saddles, they formed a group near Apsley House, where they could criticise both riders and carriages.

'He seems to have lost all his spirits,' said a second.

'Had his tongue cut out while he was away, I

should think,' said a third. 'Haven't heard him speak since he came back.'

'Somebody said he was in love with Dalilah,' said the first.

'Steady!' cried the Major; 'here he comes, riding down straight towards us. Why, what's he at now? He has turned round, and is galloping back as if he were mad.'

And in truth Sir Gilbert had set spurs to his horse, and with flashing eyes, and an expression very different to that which he had hitherto worn, was making his way towards Albert Gate.

Ten minutes after, he came riding slowly back.

The crowd had dispersed, and the Row was now empty.

'I could not have been mistaken,' said he; 'it must have been she, and with her the woman who was her attendant at the Madeleine! But on foot, and how different from last night! How simply dressed! and her hair how plainly arranged! At what a rapid pace she walked, as though seeming to wish to avoid recognition; and yet I thought for one instant her eyes lighted upon me, and a burning flush mounted to her cheek. Why did she not stay and speak? What can have been the reason for this mystery? Thank heaven I am to see her this afternoon, and then I shall know.'

As Sir Gilbert Montacute was standing at his door and watching the horses which his groom was leading away, a man in a stable-dress came up to him, and touching his hat, said inquiringly, 'Sir Gilbert Montacute?'

'That's my name,' said Gilbert.

'This is for you, sir,' said the man, handing him a

letter; 'there is no answer.' And after again saluting, he turned round and walked rapidly away.

When Sir Gilbert entered his library, he threw himself into an easy-chair and opened the letter.

It was written in a delicate female hand and on scented note-paper, and ran as follows :

'BELOVED,—Circumstances have arisen which render it impossible for me to see you at five this afternoon, or to receive you here for a long time, if ever.

'But it is equally impossible for me to deny myself the pleasure of gazing on those glorious eyes, of listening to that sweet voice, of thrilling throughout my entire being under the touch of that gentle hand.

'So I have arranged a place of meeting which will be safe, and must be secret.

'A carriage, with gray horses, will draw-up by the Marble Arch as the gate-clock points to twelve to-night. Accost the man who will descend from the box with the word "Pierre."

'He will then pronounce your name, and you can enter the carriage and be driven to where you will be—ah, how anxiously!—expected by your adoring D.'

Why did the thought of Maitland's warning flash across Sir Gilbert Montacute as he read these words?

CHAPTER VII.

THE REVENGE.

THE house occupied by Prince Polonia, the Austrian Ambassador, stood in one of the West-end squares, along one side of which it almost entirely extended.

A high frowning brick-wall screened the house from public observation.

In the centre was a porter's-lodge, close by the high carriage-gates, which were flung open to admit company on occasions of ceremony.

There was, however, another entrance, which was much more used by the then denizen of the mansion. Far away in the extreme left-hand corner of the wall a little door, self-closing, and opening only with a patent key, gave upon a shrub-bordered narrow gravel path, leading directly to the private apartments of the Prince.

On the morning after the supper at Dalilah's this door was stealthily opened, and a man entering, looked round him cautiously, and finding he was unobserved, made his way towards the house.

He was a tall man, with long thin hatchet-face, a long nose, a sharp thin moustache which pointed upwards, and a mouth always wearing the expression of a sneering and cynical smile. He had stooping shoulders and a shambling gait; and there was a constant air of suspicion and mystery about him.

Even now, when he had crept up the path and arrived at the little door, he stood for a moment in a listening attitude before he applied his key and let himself in.

He found himself in a small hall inlaid with tessellated pavement, and lit through a skylight of stained yellow glass.

There was a door on either side; the one to the right was open, that to the left was closed. The newcomer passed through the door to the right, and entered a small room, fitted half as a library, half as an office, with shelves laden with various books, both printed and in manuscript, and with pigeon-holes for the reception of papers.

A large mahogany writing-table stood in the centre, covered with letters neatly arranged.

A spring-bell stood on the desk, and just by it was placed a small electric-telegraph instrument, the wires of which passed incased in a tube down the side of the desk, and through the floor.

This was the means of communication always adopted between the Prince and his private secretary (who inhabited that room), whenever the former wished for information on certain subjects which would not bear open discussion.

The private secretary, for he it was we have seen enter the house, pressed the spring-bell, and on a servant's immediately obeying the summons, he inquired whether his Highness had yet descended to his bureau.

On being answered in the affirmative, he made a sign of dismissal to the attendant, who withdrew at once; and then, pushing back a lever at the back of

the telegraph instrument, he worked the handle sharply twice backward and forward.

A responsive ringing in a distant room was faintly heard ; but after regarding the dial for two or three minutes, and perceiving no motion of the needles, the secretary seated himself at his desk, and commenced opening the vast heap of letters which the morning's post had accumulated there.

Some of these—large, heavy, official-looking documents, sealed with enormous splodges of wax bearing coats-of-arms, written in stiff round formal hands, and covered with various government franks—the secretary tossed unopened into a huge wicker-basket standing by his side.

These were the official documents of the Legation, to be dealt with by the attachés and clerks of the embassy, who were located in the different parts of the building.

The small confidential communications—many of which were marked 'Private;' the square notes on the thick cream-coloured paper, addressed in delicate female hands; the thin letters with embossed coats-of-arms for the seals, which outside looked like invitations to dinner, but when opened proved to be written in cipher—these fell more particularly within the province of the private secretary.

He was engaged in opening them when a click of the bell called his attention ; and taking those at which he had already glanced in his hand, he proceeded across the hall to the Prince's room.

A large room, hung with maps, a high standing desk in its centre, at which stood the Prince engaged in writing.

He was dressed in a suit of dark-purple velvet, and was smoking a cigarette. He looked up as the secretary entered. Seeing who it was, he motioned him to be silent whilst he finished his writing, and then turned round and addressed him.

‘Well, Morton! what news do you bring me?’

‘Letters, your Highness, by this morning’s post;’ handing them; ‘and I have not yet finished opening the budget.’

‘Ah, bah! they are all of the old kind,’ said the Prince, glancing through them; ‘dinners, balls, soirees. Will you come and see me? Will you buy my horse? Will you lend me fifty pounds? *Da capo*, the old story from beginning to end.—But it was not about this I wanted you. What about the other news?’

‘The other news? About Sir Gilbert Montacute?’

‘Dolt! have I instructed you to ask questions about any one else? Now be quick; tell me what have you learnt.’

‘He winged Captain Duval in India, taking upon himself the quarrel of a young ensign whom Duval, a noted duellist, had cheated at cards. They tell a story of him in his regiment, of his having, while lying wounded on the ground at Inkermann, picked-off a Cossack who was getting the better of a British troop-sergeant in a hand-to-hand combat.’

‘Hem! By these anecdotes you wish to convey, I presume, that there is no doubt about his skill in pistol-practice?’

‘Not the very slightest; it is as great as your Highness’s own; and that we all know is—’

‘Thank you; I will save you the trouble of paying me compliments,’ said Prince Polonia, with a sneer.

‘However, the information you have brought is valuable, and decides me as to the course to be pursued.’

‘And your Highness takes—’

‘That which we last thought of.’

‘I guessed as much, and have acted accordingly. The letter is ready.’

‘You are really a model, not merely of discretion, but of promptitude and of practical business, Mr. Morton,’ said the Prince. ‘Let me look at the letter, please.’

The secretary handed him a paper, which he read rapidly, but earnestly.

‘It is the exact pith of what we decided upon, and very cleverly put; capitally executed too, a thorough woman’s hand. Whose writing is it?’

The secretary smiled very balefully as he replied, ‘I thought your Highness would have recognised it at once. It is Fiammetta’s.’

Polonia looked at his servant for a moment without speaking; then he said, ‘Morton, you are certainly the greatest scoundrel on earth! You contrive to infuse an amount of devilish malice into all you undertake, such as no other man would even think of.’

The secretary smiled again more balefully than before, and said with a deprecating shrug of his shoulders,

‘Now your Highness is pleased to compliment me indeed.’

‘Not at all. I think you deserve the—compliment. There is scarcely another man in London—where, let them say what they will, the devil has more followers than in any other city—who could have induced Fiammetta to mix herself up in a plot in which her rival and successor was also concerned.

‘Your Highness does not imagine that Mdlle Fiammetta had the least idea of what she was doing?’ said Morton, now laughing outright. ‘I gave her to understand that it was a little intrigue of mine which she was assisting.’

‘I should think Mdlle Fiammetta must have wondered what the person with whom you had an intrigue could have been like, my poor Mr. Morton,’ said the Prince, again sneering.

No smile on Morton’s face now: bent brows, clenched teeth, set lips, and over all a dull dogged scowl of hatred and revenge.

Black as thunder, but momentary as lightning—so momentary that it was gone ere the Prince, who had glanced again at the letter, turned round, and looking at his secretary said,

‘Have you made the final arrangements?’

‘I have, your Highness,’ said Morton quite glibly and calmly.

‘Who will be inside?’

‘Paolo. I thought his hand and eye were quicker than any of the others; and his discretion is supreme.’

‘You have chosen rightly in this instance, my dear Morton, as in every other.—Now, *mon cher* Sir Gilbert, the next twenty-four hours will see you in a somewhat different position; you will have learned by then what it is to have amused yourself at the expense of a prince, and that prince a Polonia!’

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAP.

THE mysterious letter which Sir Gilbert Montacute had received, by postponing the hour of his rendezvous with his fair enslaver from five till midnight, left him his evening free.

He thought he could not better employ it than in the society of his friend Major Maitland, who was not only a most agreeable companion, but was acquainted with Dalilah.

When a man is violently in love, next to seeing the object of his passion he takes pleasure in the companionship of some one who knows her and can talk with him of her, provided always he is not a rival, and yet looks upon the lady as worthy of his friend's admiration. Towards evening, therefore, Sir Gilbert, having dressed himself, drove off to the Major's rooms.

That gallant officer was not within. He was always so well supplied with the latest scandal as to be a most welcome guest at the five-o'clock teas of those fair members of the aristocracy who delight to flavour their meal with that wholesome tonic, the detraction of their friends.

Nobody could give such exact details as the Major; nobody ever heard the latest rumour so quickly; and, truth to tell, when news was scarce, the Major's brains

served him as well as his ears, and when there was nothing to hear he began to invent.

So Sir Gilbert left word with the servant that he was going to dine at the Wilmington Club, and that if Major Maitland had no other engagement he had better come on there.

It happened fortunately that the Major was free, and was able to join his friend just when he sat down to dinner.

‘You said you would be engaged this evening, my dear Gilbert,’ said the Major, ‘and I consequently had no idea of seeing you.’

‘I was engaged, but the appointment was not of my making, and it has been deferred.’

‘Not of your making? then one can easily guess what it is; for once Rumour is not wrong in the character she gives you. Scarcely back in England a week and already immersed in appointments and assignations.’

‘I never said this was one of either,’ said Sir Gilbert, laughing; ‘indeed, I—’

‘Steady; drop that voice. Don’t you see who are coming this way?’

Sir Gilbert looked round, and observed close behind them Prince Polonia and Captain Lynch, an Irishman and a notorious duellist.

Turning back, Sir Gilbert said to the Major,

‘What on earth always upsets you so at the sight of Polonia?’

‘Nothing upsets me,’ replied the Major; ‘but it is for you that I am concerned. I have a curious pre-sentiment of evil for you at the hands of that man.’

‘My dear Maitland, you are a good and true friend, but I am well able to take care of myself.’

‘And I don’t like the new ally he has imported into the affair in the person of this Captain Lynch.’

‘You ridiculous fellow! what has Lynch got to do with it?’

‘We shall soon know; but I have my misgivings. Ah, they are separating, that’s one comfort.’

Indeed, as he spoke, Prince Polonia left the room, and Captain Lynch took the table next to that at which Sir Gilbert Montacute and his friend were seated, and ordered his dinner.

The friends chatted on, and the Captain sat in silence; but nothing worthy of any especial remark occurred until Maitland asked his friend what he proposed doing with himself after dinner.

Sir Gilbert laughed.

‘You will again imagine some wonderful story when I tell you that I am engaged at twelve o’clock; till then I am free, and will do what you like.’

At these words Captain Lynch bent quietly over his table, so as to bring himself nearer to them. This movement, though very quietly executed, was not lost upon Maitland.

‘Well,’ said the latter, ‘since you place yourself in my hands, I decide for the Royal Assyrian Palace.’

‘What on earth is the Royal Assyrian Palace?’

‘The best—that is to say, the grandest, gaudiest, most flashy of those places of entertainment called music-halls, which have sprung up since you were in London.’

‘And what shall we find there?’

‘Brilliant music, gorgeous undresses, fifty pair of excellent legs, clever scenery, and also a few pretty faces.’

‘Then it will do to pass an hour in well enough; we’ll go.’

Here Captain Lynch called a waiter to him and gave an order in an undertone.

The waiter retired, and returned, bringing pen, ink, and paper.

Captain Lynch wrote a note, and handed it to the waiter; and the Major heard him say, ‘Let a messenger start with it at once.’

A blaze of light, a deafening surge of music, an atmosphere reeking with gas-exhalations and tobacco-smoke, a crowd of men and women, the former of all kinds—dandies in faultless evening-dress, men who had lounged in, in morning costume, from their club-dinner, youths employed in great wholesale and retail establishments, and with whom the pursuit of such pleasures frequently led to a more intimate acquaintance with their masters’ tills, and thence to a personal introduction to the Lord Mayor at the Mansion-house or Sir Thomas Henry of Bow-street, and an enormous proportion of provincial visitors—Manchester men and Liverpool gentlemen, canny, keen-eyed, high-cheeked, honest men from the far north, plungers from the camps at Aldershot and Colchester, and broad-shouldered agriculturists from the eastern counties: such was the scene in which Sir Gilbert Montacute found himself on his first entrance to the Royal Assyrian Palace.

The women, alas, were of but one type—one which need not be farther dilated on here, and which should meet with pity instead of the reprobation it so frequently evokes.

‘Well, what do you think of it?’ asked the Major.

‘It is new and strange to me, and I daresay might be amusing,’ said Sir Gilbert, ‘if I could see it in anything like comfort. At present I have a stout gentleman from Yorkshire on one foot, a Hebrew from Houndsditch on the other, while a waiter is apparently endeavouring to push a glass of hot brandy-and-water through my spine. Can’t we get anywhere to sit down?’

‘My dear fellow,’ laughed the Major, ‘we couldn’t possibly take up our position amongst these worthy citizens, who are slaking their thirst and satisfying their curiosity simultaneously, in what they call the stalls in front of the stage. We couldn’t go up to the top galleries, where the heat is strong enough to take the hair off our heads; and there are only two private boxes in the house, one of which I see is full.’

‘Let’s try for the other,’ said Sir Gilbert. ‘I must sit down, or I shall drop.’

They made their way to the first tier, and luckily found the private box disengaged.

They had not been seated there five minutes when an attendant in livery opened the door, and said, in a faltering voice, ‘Beg your pardon, gentlemen; some mistake. This box is engaged; I must ask you to leave.’

Sir Gilbert rose at once, and was about to retire, when he saw a sudden change come over Major Maitland, who was looking out into the passage behind the official, and who murmured under his breath,

‘A plant, by heavens!’

Following his friend’s glance, Sir Gilbert saw in the doorway the figures of Prince Polonia and Captain Lynch. On the face of the Prince was a smile of triumph.

Instantly Sir Gilbert became alive to the situation.

He seated himself again calmly in the chair from which he had risen, and turning to the box-keeper, said, 'We were told this box was disengaged. We have paid for it; it is ours by right of first choice, and I decline to move.'

'Right, by George!' cried the Major. 'I am with you; and I should like to see the man who would make me get off this chair.'

'At any other time, Major Maitland, I shall be happy to introduce myself as the man who would make you do anything he chose, or show you the reason why,' said Captain Lynch, bowing politely; 'but this other gentleman spoke first, and my business is with him.' Then, turning to Sir Gilbert Montacute, he said, 'This is my box, sir, and I order you to leave it.'

There was something in his manner which provoked Gilbert horribly. He sprang to his feet, exclaiming, 'And I order you, sir, to go to the devil!'

Captain Lynch smiled. 'You'll have to retract those words, Sir Gilbert Montacute.'

'Shall I?'

'You will, or I'll cram them down your throat by the aid of a pistol-bullet.'

'Stop, Captain Lynch!' interposed Major Maitland. 'I am not going to have my friend made the prey of a notorious duellist.'

'You prefer letting your friend live the life of a branded coward, then,' said Lynch; 'for that will be the result if he refuses me a meeting. I'll post him in every club in London.'

'Don't be afraid, sir,' said Sir Gilbert; 'your deadly

reputation has no terror for me.—Maitland, you will act for me. Name time and place at once.'

'May I ask your Highness to see me through this?' said Lynch, turning to the Prince.

Polonia bowed. He had not spoken throughout the interview.

'Will to-morrow morning suit you, Prince?' asked Maitland. 'On the old ground behind the Wimbledon?'

'Not to-morrow morning,' said Sir Gilbert; 'I cannot come then; I am engaged.'

'I thought how it would be,' said Lynch, shrugging his shoulders.

'Make it to-morrow morning, then,' said Sir Gilbert, stamping his foot furiously; 'make it now, if you like.'

'No; to-morrow morning at five will be quite early enough,' said the Prince with a smile. 'You will be certain to be there, Sir Gilbert?'

'Certain,' said Sir Gilbert.

'We shall see,' said the Prince.

Five minutes afterwards, Gilbert took leave of Major Maitland, and calling a cab, left the Assyrian Palace.

He drove towards Grosvenor-gate.

There he dismissed the vehicle, and walked up Park-lane, then almost deserted. As he reached the Marble Arch, the clock pointed to five minutes to twelve.

He looked round him.

A neatly-appointed carriage with a pair of gray horses stood in a secluded part of the road, just out of the glare of the lamps. He passed by, threw a glance inside, and saw a female figure seated within.

Returning, he hesitated. A servant jumped from the box, touched his hat, and opened the door.

Sir Gilbert sprang up the step.

‘My darling!’ said he, with outstretched hands.

At that moment the occupant of the vehicle flung a black cloth over his head, and seized his throat with an iron grasp. At the same moment he was violently thrust forward by two men, who entered after him, closed the door, and held him down at the bottom of the carriage, which was at once driven off at a rapid pace.

CHAPTER IX.

TOO LATE.

WHEN Sir Gilbert Montacute hurried away from the Royal Assyrian Palace in order to be in time for his appointment at the Marble Arch, he left Major Maitland standing at the top of the stairs leading to the private box about which the quarrel had taken place, and by no means disposed to retire from the scene of pleasure at such an early hour.

The Major was an old campaigner, had been out both as principal and second in many affairs of honour, and never drank a glass of wine the more or less, or slept one whit less soundly, the night before meeting his antagonist on the field.

But there was something extraordinary about the conduct of the affair in which he was at present involved.

The insult put upon his friend had been so entirely gratuitous and unprovoked, that the Major could not look upon it in the light of one of those common affairs where men with too much wine in them lose their tempers and their heads without any real reason, and are only brought to their senses by a little wholesome blood-letting.

The Major took a cigar from his case, and was twirl-

ing it in his fingers as he turned over in his mind the heads of the quarrel.

Prince Polonia had left Captain Lynch at the club, and the Captain had taken a table so placed that he could hear all the conversation between Sir Gilbert Montacute and his friend.

At a certain portion of that conversation, when they had decided upon their place of amusement for the evening, Captain Lynch had hurriedly written a note, and given instructions that a messenger should be dispatched with it immediately.

Comparatively a very short time after, he and the Prince arrive at the Royal Assyrian Palace, and at once proceed to pick a quarrel with Sir Gilbert Montacute on the flimsiest and most ridiculous grounds.

All this, to Major Maitland's experienced eyes, looked very like the carrying-out of a predetermined plot.

He had seen, on the very first night of Sir Gilbert's introduction to Dalilah, that the palpable manner in which the siren had herself been smitten by the newcomer was profoundly irritating to the Prince.

He guessed that the Prince would seek to revenge himself on this interloper, and he rightly judged him to be sufficiently a man of the world to avoid letting the name of the woman be known who was the cause of the quarrel.

But why he should have been so pressing in his desire for revenge, why he could not have waited for some decent opportunity for asserting himself, was more than Major Maitland's not very original or creative brain could conceive.

Why, too, had both the Prince and Captain Lynch

been so anxious that, as soon as agreed upon, the duel should come off at once, even when Sir Gilbert, fearing lest it might interfere with the appointment to which he had been looking forward so eagerly, had requested its postponement?

There must be some sinister motive for all this. 'There is no trusting these foreigners,' said the Major, still twirling a cigar in his fingers; 'they would play you false, or put you out of the way, as readily as I would light this weed.'

He searched his pockets for his fusee-box, but could not find it; but immediately in front of him, close by where he and Sir Gilbert had been standing, he saw lying on the ground two scraps of paper.

He picked them up and looked at them attentively. One was merely an envelope addressed to Sir Gilbert; the other was the mysterious letter which he had received that morning.

As he perused this last document the Major's face grew very pale, and his hand trembled before him. Something indefinable, some feeling of fear which he could not understand, possessed him.

He knew from Sir Gilbert's own lips that an appointment which had been made for the evening had been postponed till midnight, and he had thought nothing of it.

But now, when he saw the letter, when he read the terms in which it was couched, when he saw, above all, that it was not in Dalilah's handwriting—and though Sir Gilbert, like a true gentleman, had never breathed her name, yet the Major guessed that the eagerly-expected rendezvous could have been with no one else—he became strangely alarmed.

Was this connected with his former thoughts and suspicions? Was this part of Prince Polonia's plot against Gilbert Montacute's liberty and life?

Two minutes' reflection sufficed to enable Major Maitland to decide what should be done.

He rushed down the stairs, pushing aside all who interfered with his swift progress, ran into the street, hailed a hansom which had just deposited two yellow-haired nymphs at the Palace of Delight, and bade the driver hurry as fast as his steed could cover ground to the Marble Arch.

The hansom cabman was a good specimen of his class; he dashed off at the top of his speed, cut in and out of all interposing vehicles, evinced a noble disregard of the safety of the pedestrians crossing the streets, of the kerb-stones or the lamp-posts, and in five minutes after he had started from Leicester-square, pulled up his steed, reeking and blown, opposite the end of the Edgware-road.

Three helpless females waiting for the Kilburn omnibus, an old man in a shabby camlet cloak with a high collar turned up over his chin, who was peering under the bonnet of every woman passing by, and a starved-looking little boy endeavouring to sell fusee-lights, were the only human beings stationary near the Marble Arch.

The Major had arrived too late.

He saw that, the instant he glanced round him.

Whatever foul play might have been intended, whatever wickedness might have been imagined in the deep brain of these arch-plotters, had been compassed and carried out before he had time to interpose to save his unfortunate friend, who was now probably their victim.

What was to be done?

The Major was an old soldier, prompt and ready in times of danger and distress, and one whose brain never failed to suggest, and whose courage never failed to execute.

A few minutes' reflection and he had determined what was best to be done. He sprang back again into the hansom cab, calling to the driver, 'Off again as hard as you can go ; this time to Scotland-yard.'

The cabman grinned as he gathered-up his reins. 'This is a rum start,' he said to himself. 'I bring a swell cove here, who finds nothing ; and when he finds it, he drives off to Scotland-yard to get a bobby to help him to look for it ! However, off we go !'

They started at a tremendous pace. They flew through the deserted streets, and never drew rein till they turned in under the little archway in Whitehall, and pulled-up at the small door of the plain unpretending office in Scotland-yard.

The noise of the cab drawing-up instantly brought a police-constable to the entrance.

'What is your business, sir ?' he demanded of the Major, who had jumped out of the cab.

'Most pressing and important,' said the Major.

'Generally is that brings people here,' said the policeman with a quiet smile.

'I want to see Inspector Royston,' said the Major.

'Inspector Royston of the detectives ?' asked the constable.

'The same. Is he on duty ?'

'He has just come in and gone to his room. Who shall I say wishes to see him ?'

'Say Major Maitland.'

The constable departed, leaving the Major in the

long stone room in company with a few policemen acting as reserve, the sergeant in the railroad office, and a very loud-ticking clock.

In a few moments he returned, and beckoned the Major to follow him.

He went through some passages and up a narrow winding stone staircase ; then was shown into a small snugly-furnished room, where at a desk sat a portly man of some fifty years of age.

This was Superintendent Royston, chief of the detective force.

He bowed, and motioned Major Maitland to a seat.

‘You asked for me, Major Maitland, I believe. Lucky you caught me here, for these are not my usual hours ; I only came on important business which needed looking after at once, or else I am generally snug in bed at Camberwell at this time. I have seen too much of this sort of work to relish night-work now.’

‘My business, I believe,’ said the Major, ‘is as important as any.’

‘We’re apt to think that of any business that concerns ourselves,’ said the superintendent, smiling.

‘No, but this is a matter of life and death. I fear that an intimate friend of mine has been decoyed and made away with.’

‘Ah, ah !’ said the superintendent, leaning forward and listening eagerly. ‘Let me have the details.’

Major Maitland slowly narrated, without mentioning names, the story of his friend’s assignation, of its postponement, of the quarrel at the Royal Assyrian Palace, and of the note which he had found on the floor.

‘Have you that note about you ?’ asked the superintendent.

‘It is here,’ said the Major, handing it to him.

The superintendent took it and examined it closely.

‘It is written by a woman,’ he said, ‘but not her own natural handwriting. It is evidently an attempted imitation of some one else’s. And now, Major, I am compelled to ask you for the names of these people; and first, that of your friend.’

‘I suppose I am compelled to tell you?’

‘There is no compulsion; only if I am to be of any service to you, you must do as I ask.’

‘Well, then, my friend’s name is Sir Gilbert Montacute.’

The superintendent nodded. ‘And his friend’s— I mean the gentleman who challenged him at the Assyrian Palace?’

‘Captain Lynch.’

‘Now for the name of the foreigner whom you imagine to be the prime mover in the affair.’

‘You really must have that?’

‘I really must.’

‘The Prince Polonia.’

For the first time the superintendent evinced any sign of astonishment.

‘The Prince Polonia!’ he repeated; ‘the Austrian Ambassador?’

‘The same.’

‘We are getting on dangerous ground now, indeed,’ said the superintendent, ‘and shall require an officer not merely of the greatest skill, but of the greatest caution, to work this out.’

‘And you have such a man?’

‘Half-a-dozen such; but the best of them all happens to be engaged now.’

The superintendent bent from his seat, and from under his desk pulled out a gutta-percha tube with a white-ivory mouthpiece. Applying his lips to this, he said, 'Send Sergeant Bentley to me.'

'Bentley!' repeated the Major. 'Is that a man who has lost the little finger of his left hand?'

'He has,' said the superintendent.

'I thought it must be the same. He served with me in my old regiment—a very smart fellow.'

'The smartest man we have in the detective service. Here he is.'

A rap at the door, then a tall, thin, upright man, with bronzed complexion and iron grizzly hair curling close to his head, stepped into the room and gave a military salute.

'Here's an old officer of yours, Bentley,' said the superintendent—'Major Maitland.'

Sergeant Bentley stepped forward, peering into the semi-darkness; and when he recognised the Major, repeated the salute.

'Now you are to help Major Maitland and his friend Sir Gilbert Montacute in a very delicate and difficult and dangerous matter,' said the superintendent. 'Before you take any steps, it will be necessary for you to report the whole matter to the Chief Commissioner of Police, Sir Gerald Griffin. I will give you all the details, and you will decide on what to do.'

The superintendent then narrated to the sergeant all that Major Maitland had told him.

At the conclusion of the narration the sergeant turned to the Major.

'The first thing we have to ascertain, sir, is, whether any carriage was seen at twelve o'clock to-night

waiting near the Marble Arch. That we can learn by telegraph—we have telegraph in the rooms downstairs in connection with all the principal stations—from the station in the Edgware-road. Then we will go up to Sir Gerald's—he has a party to-night; they will probably not break-up for an hour or two yet—tell him what has occurred, and learn what he wishes to be done.'

'Put on your coat, Major, and prepare for a long bout of it,' said the superintendent.

A reserve man came into the room, and handed a paper to the sergeant.

'No particular notice was taken of any carriage at the Marble Arch to-night,' said he, reading it; 'that doesn't lessen our difficulty.'

The Major then thanked the superintendent, and he and Sergeant Bentley sallied out into the night together.

CHAPTER X.

CONSTANCE GETS THE ALARM.

It was half-past one in the morning ; but Bryanstone-square was light as at noonday. Carriages with flashing lamps stood round the enclosure, and one house in the centre of the square was lighted from garret to basement ; while from the open windows poured the sounds of music, and the door was continually opening and shutting for the entrance and exit of guests and servants.

This lighted house was the residence of Sir Gerald Griffin, Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police ; and the occasion of the festivity was the birthday of Sir Gerald's eldest daughter.

Stern in his profession, having been bred up in the old military martinet school, and promoted to the position which he now held on account of his rigid discipline and inflexible morality no less than for his abilities and business qualities, Sir Gerald, when away from his office, was the idol of his home.

No one could have recognised in him the same man who would take the head of his force on the occasion of any chance of popular disturbance, stern, frowning, and impassible, and who could be cajoled by his daughter into giving-in to her every wish.

There was a lull in the music—which had been

playing since ten o'clock, for the guests had gone to supper, and the musicians were solacing themselves with creature comforts—when a cab dashed up to the door, nearly knocking-over the linkman who was in attendance, and very much outraging the dignity of the two police-constables on duty.

These advanced at once, and were about to remonstrate angrily with the driver, when they caught sight of Sergeant Bentley as he stepped out of the cab, closely followed by Major Maitland.

To the instant astonishment, not merely of the driver himself, who expected a reprimand, but to the disappointment of the crowd, who were looking forward to the fun, the two myrmidons of the law merely touched their hats, and stood on one side to let the strangers pass.

They passed through the hall, and arrived at the foot of the staircase, where a black-coated functionary demanded their names; but Sir Gerald's confidential butler, who had often seen Sergeant Bentley at the house, and knew all about the nature of his employment, fortunately happened to come by at the moment.

'What's up now, sergeant?' said he.

'Special and important case,' whispered the sergeant. 'The governor's in, I know; I must see him, whatever he's at.'

'You must wait half a second, then, for he's just returning thanks for Miss Florence's health,' said the butler, 'and not the Queen herself could move him until he has finished that, I know. There, it's all over'—as they heard a noise of cheering and clapping of hands. 'Now you slip through into the library—you know the way—and I will send Sir Gerald to you.'

Major Maitland followed the sergeant into the library.

They had been there but a few minutes when Sir Gerald Griffin entered.

He had scarcely had time enough to put-on his business aspect. His face was beaming with pleasure at the cordial manner in which his daughter's health had been drunk, and at the way in which the old friend who had proposed it had spoken of her.

Sir Gerald had met the Major in society before ; he advanced at once, and gave him his hand.

'Very sorry to have kept you, Major Maitland,' he said ; 'but the fact is, a little party—a few friends here—my darling Florence's birthday. My old friend Jack Brailsford—General Brailsford, old chum of mine in the service—his daughter Constance my girl's most intimate companion, always staying with her—just proposed Flo's health. I had to return thanks ; nearly broke down ; old fool, but couldn't help it.—Now, sergeant, to business.'

The Major narrated to Sir Gerald Griffin all his story as he had related it to the superintendent.

Sergeant Bentley then stated that he had received instructions from the superintendent, but that before taking any steps in it he had thought it advisable to let Sir Gerald know, and to ascertain whether the Chief Commissioner wished it to be dealt with in any particular manner, or whether he would leave it to the sergeant's discretion.

Sir Gerald pondered for a few moments.

He was quite the man of business now ; his face had assumed the hard anxious expression, and he sat nursing his knees and deep in thought.

'I shall leave it entirely to you, Sergeant Bentley,' said he, after a pause of a few minutes. 'I have had

frequent evidence of your discretion and sagacity, and know I may trust you. Not but that this is an exceedingly difficult case; the mere fact of the rank and position of the persons who are apparently implicated and mixed-up in it renders it so in no ordinary degree, and extra caution will have to be observed.'

'I trust,' said Major Maitland, 'that I may be permitted to take my share in assisting in the unravelment of this horrible plot, and in the discovery of my unfortunate friend, who I am afraid has been foully made away with.'

'You are an old soldier, Major Maitland,' said Sir Gerald, 'and a tried and gallant one, as we all know; but if you do take part in this—for your desire to do which I honour you—you must act under the sergeant, who is in command here.'

'I will do nothing against the sergeant's orders, you may depend upon it, Sir Gerald,' said the Major, with a faint smile.

'Then I see no objection,' said Sir Gerald.—'Now, Bentley, good-night. When I go down to Whitehall tomorrow, I will tell Superintendent Royston that whatever force you may require to aid you in this matter you are to have. Keep me daily informed of your movements. I need not impress upon you to be prompt, vigilant, and cautious. Good-night!—Major, good-night to you.'

As they left the room, and were walking along the passage leading to the dining-room, where some of the guests still lingered over the supper-table, the old gentleman turned to the Major, and said,

'I fear this is a very sad occurrence. Poor Sir Gilbert Montacute! I pity him immensely.'

The sergeant was the last through, bringing up the rear.

Immediately after this last word had been said, he felt his arm grasped, and turning round saw a lovely girl at his elbow, dressed in full ball-dress, and looking appealingly into his face. He knew her in an instant.

‘Why, Miss Constance!’ he cried.

‘You know me, it seems,’ she said.

‘O yes, miss. Bentley that was the Colonel’s servant at Allahabad—Colonel Brailsford’s servant—your father. I have carried you in these arms, miss, many a time.’

‘Yes, I recollect now. What was that, Bentley, Sir Gerald said about Sir Gilbert Montacute? is he in danger?’

‘Yes, miss—no, miss—that is to say—why, do you know him?’

‘Yes—no. O, tell me, is he in danger?’

‘He is, miss; they think he has been made away with.’

‘Gilbert! O heavens! I shall faint. Bentley, are you engaged to endeavour to discover him?’

‘I am, miss.’

‘Then you must let me know daily what progress you make. Don’t ask me why—don’t ask me anything. I shall stay here for some time. O, Gilbert, Gilbert!’

‘You shall hear from me every day, miss, until some result is obtained, so long as I am alive,’ said honest Bentley, as he followed the Major out of the house.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HOUSE ON THE RIVER.

DARK, pitch dark !

The black cloth which had been thrown over Gilbert Montacute's head still remained there.

The iron grasp round his throat had relaxed ; but his hands were tied behind him, so as to prevent any chance of his freeing himself from the incubus which darkened his vision and impeded his breathing.

He had made one attempt at struggling to get himself free ; but his ear had caught the click of a pistol, and a touch of cold steel was pressed upon his hand as a hoarse voice in a foreign accent bade him keep quiet if he wished to preserve his life.

He remained seated at the bottom of the carriage into which he had been thrown, between the knees of the men who had entered after him.

The third man—for, although dressed as a woman, the muscular gripe in which Sir Gilbert had been caught on his first approaching the carriage by the form seated therein could have belonged to none but a stalwart man—was evidently the superior of the party.

It was he who had spoken to Sir Gilbert in the foreign accent, and who was keeping watch over him, with knife and pistol ready for instant use.

Whither was he being conveyed? He could not form the smallest idea. The carriage in which he had been deposited seemed on his first seizure to have been driven round in circles several times. This was evidently with a view to confuse him, and of making it impossible for him to recognise the route which it might be taking.

Then it was driven off at full speed, the horses galloping, and the carriage swaying to and fro under the influence of the rapid motion.

Twice they stopped. From the sounds which, blunted and subdued, reached his ears, deadened by the cloth with which his head remained covered, Gilbert imagined that the horses were being changed.

Extra precaution, too, was at these times taken by his guards. They thrust him still closer to the bottom of the carriage, and held him there until the journey was again resumed, when they permitted him to rise into the position which he previously occupied.

So on through the night.

At length Gilbert imagined, from the difference in the motion of the carriage, that the wheels had left the high hard road, and were proceeding over turf.

There was a momentary halt. One of his guards descended, and exchanged some words, unintelligible to him, with the coachman, then he resumed his seat, and the journey was proceeded with.

Wearied and fatigued, Gilbert fell into a state of slumber. When he awoke the black cloth was still round his head. He felt through it the chill night-air. Then he was lifted up, and carried bodily out of the carriage in the arms of the men for some little distance.

‘You may call out as loud as you like now, Sir Gil-

bert,' said the same mocking voice in the foreign accent, 'for there is no one to hear you but the water-fowl and the fishes.'

The water-fowl and the fishes! It was to the river they were taking him! Were they about to drown him?

He had scarcely time to think, but had determined upon making one struggle for his life, when he felt himself deposited in a boat, which was immediately afterwards rowed off.

After ten minutes the keel grated on the gravelly shore; then he was lifted out as he had been lifted in.

He felt himself being carried upstairs.

Then the cloth was removed from his head.

He had just time to mark the ruinous tumble-down condition of the room in which he found himself, when a handkerchief soaked in some strong essence was placed beneath his nose, and the next instant he fell back insensible.

CHAPTER XII.

FOUL PLAY SUSPECTED.

AT five o'clock on the previous evening Dalilah sat in the boudoir of the Little House in Piccadilly. She was dressed in exquisite taste. Her lovely hair arranged according to the latest fashion, her dress low and diaphanous, and her arms encircled by magnificent bracelets.

As the clock struck, she put down the book that she was reading, and looked out of the window commanding a view of the Green Park.

'At last,' she said to herself,—'at last I shall experience the luxury of being beloved by some one for whom I myself care. How long is it since I felt my heart beat with anxiety at the approach of any one! How long is it since the smiles that appear on my cheek have been real and not fictitious! How long is it since I felt my heart go out to meet the coming one and give him loving welcome!'

She rose from her seat, and approaching the window looked out.

'There they are,' she said; 'the crowds of fashion, scores among whom look up at this house and speak of me, its mistress, as they go by; who are proud to receive a nod or a smile from me, who would give me

almost anything I asked for; and yet for whom I have not the slightest feeling even of regard. How strange it is that this one man should on a sudden have exercised so wonderful a fascination over me, who have always prided myself on my powers of self-control!

‘Yes, I love him! The mere touch of his hand, the mere thrilling tone of his voice, create in me illusions such as I had never dreamed to have again, such as I have never felt since—O, how many years ago, down on the shore where the fishers dwell and the great sea murmurs hoarsely in its caves!’

A change has come over her face, as these thoughts cross her mind. She turned suddenly away from the window, and walking across to her writing-table, opened one of the drawers, and took out a morocco-leather-covered picture-case. It was large and square, and closed securely with a golden lock.

Taking a small key which hung on the bunch of charms at her watch-chain, Dalilah opened the case, and gazed long and earnestly on its contents. It was a simple and not very well-executed photograph of a landscape. Down in the hollow lay the fishing-village, with queer gabled roofs and twisted chimneys, and the old square church-tower rising in the midst, while in the foreground were the fishing-craft, the cobbles, with all their accompaniments of sails and nets and other gear, and the sea tossing and tumbling at their feet.

As Dalilah gazed on this pictured scene, two large tears welled from her eyes and dropped on the glass. Brushing them hastily away, she closed the case, and locking it, replaced it in its drawer, and turned to the little ivory clock, one of a half-dozen which were ticking away in the room.

‘A quarter past five,’ said she, half aloud. ‘Gilbert is unpunctual. And yet he looked so pleased when I accorded him the rendezvous, one would have thought he would have kept his time to a minute. Can anything have happened to him? Can he by any accident— How very absurd! Here is a man in London a quarter of an hour late keeping an appointment, and I am talking to myself as though he could have been carried off by banditti, or spirited away by the machinations of some rival!’

The half-hour chimed from the little ivory clock.

‘This is getting too bad,’ said Dalilah, impatiently tapping her foot. ‘Sir Gilbert Montacute, I fancy, can scarcely appreciate the honour which has been done him. There are scores of others who would give half they possess to have heard the words addressed to them which I whispered in his ear. He must— How absurd of me! Something has detained him. Even if love and hope do not impel him to come here, he is too much of a gentleman to break an appointment with a lady.’

She took up her book, and endeavoured to go on with her reading; but she could not fix her attention. Ever and anon she rose from her chair, paced the room with hurried footsteps, then stood looking vacantly out of the window, gazing on the rolling tide of fashion, now passing back from the Park and the promenade to dress for dinner and its evening gaiety—gazing at it, but seeing nothing.

Eight o’clock. The groom of the chambers entered.

‘Dinner is ready, madam,’ he said; ‘but you ordered covers to be laid for two, and the guest has not arrived.’

‘Let it all be taken away,’ she said. ‘I am ill, and can eat nothing.’

Then, when the man was gone, she rushed to the door, turned the key, and threw herself on the sofa in an agony of tears.

Bitter, bitter tears; tears of humiliation and disappointment—of disappointment that the hours which she had thought to pass in his company, and shrouded in his arms, and listening to all the blandishments of that old, old story, which has always renewed interest when told by a new tongue, should have been gone through in solitude and waiting; tears of humiliation at the thought that any man should have ventured to make light of or to spurn the love which she had proffered him.

The evening changed to dusk, and the dusk deepened into dark, and still she lay there.

She had given orders that she was not to be disturbed, and that any one inquiring for her was to be told she had gone out.

There were numerous inquiries, and to all the same answer was given. They sought her at the Opera, at the various theatres which she was known to patronise, and returned again to her house, to be answered in the same words.

Dalilah was not to be seen that night.

Had she been seen, few would have recognised her in the woman with tear-blurred eyes and dishevelled hair, who lay moaning through the long watches of the night.

At two o’clock the next day, a perfectly-appointed mail phaeton drove up to Dalilah’s door.

Two grooms had descended ere the wheels had

ceased their revolutions, and were standing at the horses' heads as soon as the animals were brought to a standstill.

Prince Polonia threw down the reins, and jumped with a jaunty air to the ground. There was a latent expression of triumph in his eyes, and in the curling corners of his lips, which he tried in vain to dissemble.

He rang the bell, and on the door being opened, was immediately admitted.

'Luncheon is just served, your highness,' said the groom of the chambers, advancing to meet him, 'and you will find madam, who is only just down, in the dining-room.'

Preceded by the servant, the Prince advanced to the dining-room, and there found Dalilah standing on the hearth-rug.

Traces of the preceding night's emotion were visible in her swollen eyelids and wan cheeks.

The Prince did not fail to mark these signs, and was proportionately annoyed.

She made an attempt at cheerfulness.

'I am very glad to see you, Prince,' she said; 'I had some notion you would come to-day. I have had such a bad headache, and wanted some one to cheer me.'

'You look as if you had been suffering from—from something,' said the Prince.

'Merely a nervous headache—woman's weakness, you know,' said Dalilah, endeavouring to smile.

'I was afraid it was something worse,' said the Prince.

'Why?'

'Because you were not in the Row this morning,

and I know that that is your favourite resort whenever you are in health.'

'I should not have had strength enough to hold the Rover this morning,' said Dalilah. 'He would have bolted with me, and we might have had some accident.'

'When I found you were not there, I came straight here,' said the Prince; and they sat down to luncheon.

During the meal the conversation was slow and forced. Each was playing a part, and each tried to hide that fact from the other.

Dalilah was obviously so preoccupied, she found it so difficult to fix her attention on what was passing before her, that the Prince became deeply annoyed.

'Where are your thoughts?' he said, after a lengthened pause. 'I wonder to what wild region they have flown, and with whom they are occupied.'

'My thoughts!' exclaimed Dalilah; 'they are indeed the veriest scapegraces, wandering here and there, and scarcely ever settled for a moment.'

'The more lucky he on whom for ever so short a time they happen to alight,' said the Prince, with a sneer. 'Who is now that fortunate man?'

'I should be puzzled to say,' said Dalilah, with an attempt at a smile.

'If I were permitted to guess,' said the Prince, 'I should say there could be no doubt that the happy man who holds possession of your thoughts is the newcomer, Sir Gilbert Montacute.'

'Sir Gilbert Montacute!' repeated Dalilah, trembling.

'The same; though where he may be is beyond the power of any of us to guess.'

‘Where he may be!’ said Dalilah. ‘I don’t understand you; what do you mean?’

‘Simply this, that this wonderful chivalrous knight-errant—this pink of everything that is honourable, and daring, and manly—is afraid of risking his valuable life, and has disappeared.’

‘Disappeared! Risking his life! Why should he risk it? What has he done?’

‘Last night, in a public place, he insulted a friend of mine,’ said the Prince.

‘What was your friend’s name?’

‘Captain Lynch.’

‘Ah!’ said Dalilah, with an expression of contempt; ‘go on.’

‘A meeting was arranged between them, to take place this morning, at five o’clock, behind the old wind-mill on Wimbledon common. Lynch had asked me to be his second, and I could not refuse. At a quarter to five we were there; we waited till nearly six, and Montacute did not make his appearance.’

‘Did you hear nothing? Did no one come from him?’

‘Yes, Major Maitland, who was to have acted as his friend, put in an appearance.’

‘And what did he say?’

‘Made a ridiculous excuse. Said that he had been to Montacute’s rooms, that he had searched for him everywhere, and that he was nowhere to be found.’

Dalilah’s face was very eager now.

She leant forward, and sunk her voice to a whisper as she said,

‘Major Maitland is a clever man and a gentleman. Did he say what he thought had become of Sir Gilbert?’

‘O, he talked some nonsense about his friend’s having been prevented keeping his appointment by foul play.’

‘He was right. Did he say by whom the foul play had been prompted?’

‘He said he did not know.’

‘Then I do,’ said Dalilah, springing to her feet. ‘By you, Prince Polonia — by you, and no one else! Do you think I have not watched you since you first met that man at this house; how you then tried to irritate him over the card-table; how madly jealous you were of every attention he paid me, of every word I spoke to him? Do you think that I do not know that this Captain Lynch is a mere creature of yours—a hired bravo whose pistol is at your service whenever you require it? Do you think I cannot see how you have set him on to pick a quarrel with this man, and how, fearful of being implicated in the matter—as you would have been, had the duel been made public and your share in it become known—you have caused him to be put out of the way? And do you think that I will stand by and see my lover—yes, for he loves me, and I love him, writhe as you may—and see my lover spirited away in this fashion? I defy you, Prince Polonia! I take up this search for Gilbert Montacute; and, believe me, you had better have a tigress on your track than Dalilah outraged and offended!’

CHAPTER XIII.

CONSTANCE ON THE TRACK.

ON the evening of the fourth day after the party at Sir Gerald Griffin's, Sergeant Bentley jumped out of a cab at the door, and descended the area steps.

He had been there every day since the party, and very frequently before; so that his appearance was well known to the servants, and they were not surprised to see him.

He gave a circular nod, which included them all, as he passed through the servants' hall, and, preceded by the confidential butler, went up the staircase.

'No news?' asked the butler when they reached the hall.

'Not a syllable,' said the sergeant.

'Poor young lady!' said the butler; 'she will be dreadfully grieved; she does seem to hanker so after news. Some love-affair, I suppose, ain't it?'

'Can't say,' said the sergeant; 'don't know, and should not think it right to tell if I did. Only you and I, as men of the world, old friend, know that it always is a love-affair as is the matter with women.'

The butler nodded, and looked half pitying, half scornful. He had done with all matters of that kind many years ago, and for a long time had thought a great deal more about his stomach than his heart.

‘You had better go in,’ he said, pointing to a door; ‘you will find her there, and alone, I think.’

Sergeant Bentley knocked at the door, and on being bade to come in, entered.

He found two young ladies reading together, but on his appearance one of them rose and at once left the room, leaving the sergeant alone with Miss Constance Brailsford.

‘Good-evening, Bentley,’ said she. ‘I am afraid there is no need to ask you whether there is any intelligence; I think I can see by your face that you have no news.’

‘Not a syllable, Miss Constance; not the least clue.’

‘You are not beginning to be disheartened, I hope?’

‘O no, not disheartened at all—so far as giving up the job, I mean; nor do I think there is any chance of any greater danger having happened to Sir Gilbert on account of our not yet having struck upon his trail; but you see, miss, when one doesn’t get hold of some little bit of information within the first few days, just a little scrap to hang-on by, don’t you know, it is desperate.’

‘Of course it is, Bentley; I can fully understand that. You talked yesterday of some female accomplice. Have you discovered her?’

‘I have discovered what I thought was her, Miss Constance, and never was so regularly sold in all my life. From what I can make out, the party that I thought was an accomplice is a beautiful woman who was dead nuts on Sir Gilbert herself, and who is raving and screaming, and bewailing his loss in a most awful manner.’

‘A woman!’ said Constance; ‘and when you say dead nuts, do you mean fond?’

‘Yes, miss,’ said the sergeant; ‘beg your pardon for the vulgarity of the expression, but I forgot myself; regularly fond of, spooney on—you know what I mean.’

‘And this—this lady is, you say, greatly distressed at Sir Gilbert’s disappearance?’

‘Well, she is not quite a lady, Miss Constance,’ said the sergeant, shaking his head; ‘I mean she has got plenty of money, and horses, and carriages, and jewels, and plays the piano, I daresay, but still she is not quite a lady; but she is in a awful taking about this business. It might be all kid, I know—I mean it might be all sham and put on; but hers is the real article, I can swear to that.’

‘How did you hear of this?’ asked Constance.

‘She sent after one of my mates that she had employed once before, when one of her bracelets was stolen, and told him all about this, and wanted him to pursue it; but he had heard about the job from me, at least so far as I thought fit to tell him, and he told her I was on to it, and that she might depend all that could be done would be.’

‘Recollect, Bentley,’ said Constance hurriedly, ‘you must not be taken off by any one else; it is for us you are working, for Major Maitland and me.’

‘Lord bless you, miss!’ cried Bentley, interrupting her, ‘you may depend upon me; it is my duty in the first place, and my wishes in the second, to serve Major Maitland, who I served under, and you whose honoured father I served under, and to try and find out this poor gent as has been made away with somewhere; and when

my duty and my wishes runs together, it'll be very odd if we don't some time or other get what we want.'

The sergeant was gone, with his usual promise to return at the same hour the next day.

After his departure, Constance Brailsford remained seated, leaning back in her chair, her head resting on her hand, cogitating deeply.

'Four days have now passed,' she said to herself, 'since Gilbert was missing; four nights since that dreadful one on which he was spirited away; and to think that though I have looked upon him, I have never heard his voice, that we have only the merest knowledge of each other, and that came by a passing glance in a crowd; and yet I feel sure that during that fleeting interview at the Madeleine—interview it can hardly be called, passing as it did in a moment—he was as much struck with me as I was with him. And now, when I hoped to make his acquaintance, when I dared to think that perhaps that long yet fleeting look of love might be translated into words, I find him gone, the mysterious hero of some dreadful adventure.

'This woman, too, that Bentley spoke of, who is so desperately in love with him, and so frantic at his disappearance—who can she be? Can she have any legitimate hold upon him? O, no! Had it been so, Gilbert would never have looked at me as he did. He is too true a gentleman to betray a trusting heart, and in this instance two such hearts might have suffered. And yet, who can she be?

'She wanted to engage assistance in the search, did she? She must be singularly interested in him to do that, thus showing the world how deeply she feels his loss. Not a lady, though, old Bentley said; perhaps

she is one of those who ignore the world's remarks, and don't care how much they parade their feeling before it.

'Frantic at his loss, eh ?

'What right has she to bemoan my Gilbert ?

'My Gilbert ! Fool that I am ! What right have I to call him mine, to whom I have never spoken, with whom I have only interchanged love in looks ?'

She started to her feet, and standing before the looking-glass, pushed her hair from off her forehead, and gazed at her reflection.

Then her eyes dropped, and she fell into a new train of thought.

'It is plain,' she said to herself, 'that Sergeant Bentley and all the regular machinery of the law is at fault in this matter. The length of time that has now elapsed since Gilbert's disappearance seems to me to be almost fatal to the chance of any discovery being made through them. Where—where can one turn ? What agency can be put in force ?'

As she cast her eyes round in her despair, they alighted upon a large sandal-wood workbox. It was of Indian manufacture, and had belonged to her mother. Constance's earliest associations were with this box, and after her mother's death she treasured it as one of her greatest prizes.

A sudden thought struck her. She opened the box, and from one of its inmost recesses drew out a dirty crumpled bit of paper.

This she spread out before her, and read as follows :

'You'll wonder to git this scrap of paper from me ; it'll be so dirty and badly spelt that perhaps you won't

read it. I can't help it if you don't, only I must say this to you. You saved me from the traps last night. I'm the man what broke into your father's house and dropped my lamp when I saw you. Why did I drop my lamp? Because you're the likeness of my old luv—her that I lost this many a year, the loss of whom drove me to sin and wickedness, and drink, and all manner of crimes; and when I saw you, I thought it was her come back to me again, like a angel as she might be. I was so dumbfounded at the sight of yer, that I thought I should have a fit; but I had my senses enuf about me to notice yer point me ther way wher I run when the house was disturbed, and to notice yer calling off the too dogs which they sit upon me in the garding, and which would have torn me to strips if they hadn't known yer voice, and come off when yer called 'em. I owe you my life, for it was gone then but for you. I know that, and I found out who you are, and I want to rite to yer to say this. If ever I can help yer—and a mouse helped a lion I remember reading in a book once when I was a boy—if ever I can be of service to yer, I will.

'I would lay down my life—not that that is of much 'count, I care very little for it now—to save you a scratch. I might be able to be of some use to you some day. I can't tell how, but I might be. Swells like you want us sometimes.

'You might have a pet dorg stole; then send for me, and I'll get it back if it's on the face of the earth.

'Some man might insult yer, and yer might want him well licked, and not like to ask one of yer swell friends to do it. Send for me, and I'll break every bone in his skin.

‘You might want something found out, which only me and my pals—a regular bad lot, mind yer; up to everything as is dark—can find out. Yer might; it sounds odd, I know, but yer might. Then send for me, and consider it done.

‘A letter posted to Mr. Mace, at the Salmon and Ball, Ratcliffe-highway, will allus find me; but you must come to where I say. I’ll rite and name a place and time. You come to it. Don’t be afraid. I swear before God to stand between you and all harm.—Tom. MR. MACE.’

‘Pretty production, truly,’ said Constance, with a half-contemptuous smile, as she finished its perusal; ‘and yet I am glad that I did not show it my father when I received it, or above all, let Sergeant Bentley know its contents, as I had half a mind to do when I first heard he was engaged in this matter. Any communication with such authorities—even if the authorities themselves would have engaged in it—would have frightened my correspondent, and prevented him being of the slightest use to me.

‘Can he be of any use now?’

‘I rather think so; at all events it will be worth trying. Now, Constance, show if you are the mere timid shrinking girl that you have always been supposed to be. Show if, when occasion requires, you can really have something more than a woman’s courage.

Recollect, it is for Gilbert—for Gilbert!’

CHAPTER XIV.

THE APPOINTMENT.

TWELVE o'clock at midnight tolled from Big Ben about four nights after the date on which Constance had read the letter from the burglar, and determined upon enlisting his services in her enterprise.

Twelve o'clock ! The death of another day, another item added to the list of those which had passed since Sir Gilbert Montacute had been lost sight of !

Was there no relief coming ? Was there a chance of her being able to fathom this terrible mystery ?

Constance thought that if forty-eight hours more passed over her head without her arriving at some solution of what had happened—at some idea, either good or bad, of what had befallen him—she should give way under mental pressure.

Heaven help the horrid thought from running in her mind ! but it would be even better to hear of him in an extremity of danger, whence indeed there was a chance of rescuing him, than not to hear of him at all.

Twelve o'clock ! The deep sound struck on Constance's ear as she alighted from the cab at the corner of one of the streets which, debouching from the Strand, run down to the river.

The main thoroughfare was busy with life ; as her cab had driven past Charing-cross, it had almost run against the neatly-appointed carriage in which her host Sir Gerald was being whirled back from the House of Commons, where he had been to consult the Home Secretary on a delicate subject. Good Sir Gerald thought that his favourite guest and daughter's dearest friend was snug at home in her bedroom and sound asleep at that moment. Mademoiselle Sophie, who accompanied Miss Griffin's friend to the rendezvous, was thoroughly to be trusted, and had a latch-key of her own.

The Strand itself was humming like a hive. People were pouring out of the various theatres ; some hurrying away homewards in the cabs and broughams which were waiting for them ; hoarse linkmen were bawling out distinguished names with more or less accuracy ; the doors of the taverns were besieged by thirsty claimants anxious for admission and a hurried drink before the final closing for the night.

But the street down which Constance walked with trembling steps, closely attended by Sophie, was as silent as the grave.

The houses were nearly all let as lodgings, the occupants of which seemed all to have retired to rest, and the footfall of the two women was the only sound that broke upon the ear.

The policeman of the beat very seldom if ever took the trouble to come down this dull deserted street. There was nothing even for him to do there, and there was, to say the least of it, much more excitement in looking after the noisy gents who, three or four abreast, patrolled the Strand shouting out the latest music-hall

choruses, and more profit in taking the shillings which they frequently in their drunken generosity bestowed on the assiduous 'bobby.'

Arrived at the bottom of the street, Constance motioned to Sophie to retire a few paces, and then herself proceeded to a railing through which she saw the dark flowing water of the Thames.

She shuddered for a minute at the dreary prospect, then collecting herself, she clapped her hands very gently three times.

At first, though she steadfastly gazed at the river before her, she saw nothing but the heavy craft which lay moored in the immediate vicinity. Then, after a minute, at some little distance she descried a small boat gliding in and out among the barges as it approached. It shot-in immediately under the railing alongside the wall.

The man who was rowing, by an active movement shipped his oars; then, after a careful glance around him, rose in the boat, and gradually drew himself up until he stood on the other side of the railing facing Constance.

'It is you, miss, I see,' he said. 'You have shown rare pluck in keeping this appointment; but after what I saw that night I knew you would not fail, wherever I named. Hulloo!' he suddenly cried, pointing to the figure of Sophie in the distance, 'you are not alone. Who is that?'

'My maid; she accompanied me. I could not come by myself. I have never been alone before.'

'Lord, no! of course not. What a fool I am! I never thought of that. Of course I didn't imagine you was playing me double, or any game of that sort; but

I was surprised, you see. Now then, what can I do for you ?

With as much brevity as was compatible with clearness, Constance made Tom Weldon acquainted with the circumstances of Sir Gilbert's disappearance, and told him how the police were engaged in the matter ; bidding him, if there were any danger to himself, not to dream of helping her in it.

‘ Nevertheless,’ she said in conclusion, ‘ as I have treated you with the confidence you asked for, and as these extraordinary relations have thus sprung-up between us, I myself tell you that I take the deepest interest in Sir Gilbert, and that his welfare is dearer to me than my own.’

‘ I see, Lord love yer !’ said Tom, with a heavy sigh ; ‘ I can understand all about it. I was so that way, miss, once, and honestly too ; but that is all over now. Don’t you be afraid. I know all the bad uns in town, and have some hold on a good many of ’em ; and if this man’s above ground, you shall have him **back** sooner or later, so help me Heaven !’

CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGE MEETING.

As Tom Weldon uttered the words last recorded, he raised his hands to heaven, as though in witness of the solemnity of his promise. Then he made a rough uncouth bow to Constance, and began to swing himself down from the railings.

He reached the boat in safety, and seated himself in it. The next moment its dark outline was seen gliding among the barges at anchor, and then it disappeared.

Constance turned, and quickly rejoined Sophie the waiting-maid, who all this time had remained at a little distance.

‘Come, Sophie,’ said she, ‘let us get back as soon as possible. I trust our absence has not been noticed.’

‘No fear of that, mademoiselle,’ said the waiting-maid. ‘All will have been in bed some time but Sir Gerald, and he is too sleepy when he comes home to do anything more than to go straight to bed.’

By this time they had reached the top of the street, and were in the Strand.

A great change had come over the locality during the time that Constance was holding conversation with Tom. The public-houses were all closed; the revel-

lers were either all gone home to bed, or taken to the police-station. The respectable people had availed themselves of the last trains and of the last omnibuses, and the streets looked black and deserted.

Not a single cab was to be seen.

A policeman, astonished at the sight of two quietly-behaved and modestly-attired women at that time of night, walked up to them, and in respectful tones asked whether he could serve them.

Constance told him she was looking for a vehicle in which to be taken home.

The policeman shook his head, and said he feared she would have some difficulty in meeting with one; the cabs were mostly taken up immediately after the closing of the theatres, and only occasional crawlers passed down the street at that hour in the morning.

So the two women set out, not without fear and trembling, to walk home.

Save an occasional policeman, and a few poor night-wanderers listlessly passing up and down in hopeless heartless misery, they met no one.

When they reached Charing-cross, they looked up and down the long vistas terminating in that noble site, Trafalgar-square.

There were two or three vehicles dotted about it in the far distance, but they were evidently private carriages. No cab was to be seen.

They crossed the square.

A brougham with flashing lamps was standing opposite the Union Club.

As Constance and the maid went by, the light from these lamps flashed full upon their faces.

At the same instant a man who was coming down

the steps of the club started, hesitated, then rushed up and seized Constance by the wrist.

‘Dalilah!’ he cried, ‘why are you here?’

‘Sir!’ exclaimed Constance.

‘Don’t palter with me!’ cried the man, who was no other than Prince Polonia; ‘thanks to the light from my lamps, I recognised you instantly.’

‘I tell you, sir, you are mistaken!’ cried Constance.

‘Ah, you may disguise your voice, but you will not deceive me,’ said the Prince. ‘I am fool enough to have studied every feature of your face too well. Where have you been? What have you been doing at this hour of the night?’

‘I decline to answer any questions, and insist on your releasing my hand,’ said Constance, struggling to free herself.

‘Dalilah, will you tell me where you have been?’

‘I am not the person you suppose, and I decline to answer any questions.’

‘By heavens!’ said the Prince, with a sudden start, ‘I guess the meaning of this disguise, the altered arrangement of your hair, this attempted change in your voice; you have been seeking for Sir Gilbert Montacute.’

‘Gilbert Montacute!’ cried Constance, with a shriek; ‘what do you know of him?’

‘Know of him?’ said the Prince; ‘I know that I hate and loathe him. He has come across my path, and must abide by the consequences.’

‘You know where he is?’

‘This is too much,’ said the Prince, foaming with rage. ‘The last time we met, I told you how I hated this man. You thought to frighten me by your tragedy

airs, and accused me of having been the means of getting this lover of yours—for he is your lover,' said he, turning angrily to her, and compressing her wrist with renewed force.

'O, spare me!' said Constance.

'What! you confess it, then, now. You denied my right to ask you questions before, and now you confess it. One word at parting—whether he be your lover or not, you will never see Sir Gilbert Montacute more!'

He flung her from him with such force that she sank upon the pavement. Then he leapt lightly into his brougham, and was at once driven away.

Poor Sophie, frightened out of her life, bent over Constance's senseless form, and had the satisfaction in a few moments of seeing her revive.

The girl opened her beautiful eyes, and looked round her, at first vacantly, and then with an expression of horror.

'Was it a dreadful dream?' she cried. 'No, it was a reality. He stood here close by me, called me by a name that was not mine, and talked of matters of which I know nothing; and yet he mentioned Gilbert, said he knew I loved him. Great heavens! where can he have learned that secret, which I thought I had guarded so religiously from all? And Gilbert's fate—he spoke of that too; he seemed to know what had become of him. What a desperate-looking man! How his eyes flashed, and how fiercely he spoke! How much more desperate he looked than that poor outcast with whom I had the interview at the river-stairs! Who can he have been? for whom can he have taken me? how can he have guessed at my secret?—O Sophie, take me home, for I feel my brain is reeling.'

Luckily at that moment a four-wheeled cab came crawling by. Sophie hailed it, and with the assistance of the driver managed to get the young lady inside; for Constance had fainted again, and her face was deathly pale.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PRISONER.

WHEN Sir Gilbert Montacute regained his consciousness, he found himself lying on a small truckle-bed in the corner of an old-fashioned room.

His coat and waistcoat and his neckerchief had been removed, and a common coarse rug had been thrown over him.

He seemed to have lost all his energy, and felt listless and worn-out.

As the events of the previous night came crowding upon his brain, the recollection of them excited him sufficiently to induce him to endeavour to shake-off the languor which oppressed him.

He managed to raise himself on his elbow, and looked round the room.

It was very old-fashioned, with a low ceiling, from which in many places the plaster had fallen, leaving the rafters exposed, with a deep bay-window with small diamond-shaped panes of glass securely fixed in lead, and with casements opening outwards.

Round the lower part of the window inside ran a shelf apparently intended for a seat, but which was now occupied by some large pots of blooming flowers.

These flowers were the first indications of anything like refinement which Gilbert had perceived.

He looked at them with delight, for he thought they betokened a woman's presence, and Gilbert Montacute's experience of women had hitherto been always pleasant and agreeable.

Save the bed on which he lay, a couple of antique chairs, and a huge antiquated oak coffer, there was no furniture in the room.

As the fumes of the narcotic with which he had been drugged gradually faded away from his brain, Gilbert felt his strength returning, and determined to reconnoitre his quarters.

He threw the coarse rug from off his limbs, and started to his feet.

He listened. Not a sound was to be heard, except the chirping of birds and a constant monotonous never-ceasing lapping of water.

Water! The sound itself recalled to him the crossing in the boat on the previous night, the steady stroke of the muffled oars, the being borne along as though he were a corpse.

Yes, he remembered all. To what place could they have brought him?

Gently, silently, and with the utmost caution, he crept across the floor towards the window.

His shoes had been removed—they were not to be seen—and in his stockinged feet he moved so quietly that even the creaking boards of the old house were silent beneath his tread.

He reached the window, and stood transfixed with amazement.

So far as he could see, the house to which he had been brought stood on a very small island, or, as it is technically called, an eyot, in the middle of the Thames.

In what part of the river this island was situated Gilbert Montacute could not imagine.

It must be somewhere where the stream was running at its broadest, for on the other side there was considerable distance between the island and the mainland.

And that mainland—where could it be?

Gilbert thought he knew the Thames thoroughly from Sheerness to Pangbourne, but he had no recollection of any scenery such as that on which he looked.

A low flat barren shore; no luxuriant corn-fields, no blooming meadows, no lovely gardens with their trimly-kept lawns sloping down to the water's edge. Here and there patches of rank grass; then bald spots covered with oozing slime and refuse of vegetation which had been washed up and left there by the tide; then beds of rushes waving to and fro in the wind, and osier-beds with here and there the whitened stump of a squat pollard willow rising in the midst.

As he gazed at this scene of desolation, Gilbert's heart sank within him.

He was astonished, however, to perceive that the little plot of garden-ground immediately underneath the window from which he was gazing was filled with fresh blooming flowers, was elegantly laid out, scrupulously kept, and evidently attended to by some one whose industry was equal to her refinement.

This must be the same person, he thought, who had arranged the flowers in the window.

He had not time to think more, for a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and a rough, coarse, yet not unpleasant voice bade him prepare for breakfast.

Gilbert turned round, and found a man standing

immediately behind him; a thick-set, square-built man, with a large head covered with a thatch of coarse gray hair, a fringe of grizzled whisker round his face, bright blue eyes, thick flat nose, and a huge sensual mouth.

There was a look of humour in the fellow's face as Gilbert stared up at him.

'Ready for your breakfast, cap'n?' he said; 'what would you like to have? Put a name to it, and you shall have it in a jiffy—leastwise, if it's hegg and bacon, or a hegg or two, for that's all we have got in this place.'

'Who are you, and why am I detained here?' said Gilbert.

'As to who I am, I will tell you presently; but as to why you are detained here, as you call it, that is quite another thing. Look'e here, cap'n; let's come to a bit of a understanding about this at once. It is no good your trying that caper with me, because I know nothing about it, and if I did I shouldn't tell. All I know is, you are here, and it's my business to see you don't get away, and to make you as comfortable as circumstances will permit. Now, once more about breakfast; is it to be a hegg, or some 'am?'

'And do you think I will permit this, you scoundrel?' said Gilbert; 'do you think I will suffer myself to be kidnapped and hidden like this?'

He sprang to his feet as he said these words; but in an instant the brawny arms of the man were round him.

In this iron grasp Gilbert felt like a child. He was swayed off his feet in an instant, and deposited, by no means roughly, however, in the window-seat again.

‘Now, *will* you be quiet, cap’n, and give up those kind of games? I shall have to hurt you, I shall indeed, and I don’t want to—’pon my soul, I don’t—’cos why, you are a gent as has never done me no harm, and I daresay is pleasant company enough when taken the right way among your own pals. Is it a hegg, now, and biled or poached?’

Gilbert could not help smiling at this man’s good-natured manner, which contrasted so oddly with the roughness of his appearance.

‘I have no appetite,’ he said, ‘and never shall have in this accursed place.’

‘Don’t say that, cap’n,’ said his new acquaintance. ‘The air hereabouts is considered very healthy—a little moist perhaps, but one can always lick that with a nip of spirits; rum is what I take myself. “How well you look, Tony!” they sez—which Tony is my name—when I cross over to the shore. “How well you look, Tony!” they sez; “living in the lighthouse seems to agree with you,” they sez. They call this the lighthouse—that is their fun, that is.’

‘The shore!’ repeated Gilbert mechanically; ‘what is that, then, over there’—pointing out of the window—‘what part of the country, I mean?’

Tony looked at him with a funny glance out of his round blue eyes, then he winked the right one several times in succession, stroked his forefinger against the side of his nose, and said,

‘No yer don’t, cap’n, not exactly; which Tony Harmer wasn’t born yesterday. Don’t you ask any questions, and you won’t hear no lies, as they sez to the kids; I mustn’t tell you anything, and I don’t intend.’

Gilbert shrugged his shoulders and stamped his foot impatiently.

‘Such an outrage as this will not be suffered to pass unpunished,’ said he. ‘However, it is not on you, the mere instrument of another’s villany, that I should seek to vent my wrath, but on your employer.’

‘That’s exac’ly it, cap’n,’ said Tony, with a nod of approbation; ‘them’s my sentiments to a ’air. Let you and me get on as well as we can; I am sorry I ain’t got sweller apartments to hoffer yer, but this is our only spare room.’

‘Are you alone within this house?’ asked Gilbert eagerly.

‘No, I am not, cap’n,’ said Tony, regarding him with a steady stare; ‘but if I was alone, I don’t think you’d git away, cap’n. You’re a likely-made chap enough, and seem pretty quick on your feet; but I’m a stiff-built un, you see, and know some werry awkward wrestling tricks; I could put you over my head and on to your own back before you could say knife! So don’t try it on, cap’n; it ain’t no use, I give you my word.’

‘You’re a queer fellow,’ said Gilbert, who could not help laughing.

‘I’m all that,’ said Tony with a grin; ‘spit-it-out-and-never-hide-nothing sort of fellow, I am; not like the cove they’ve left downstairs. Italyon I suppose he is; chap in a black beard, his ’air curled in ringlets like a gal’s; one of your say-nothing-to-nobody sort of fellow—not as I could understand him if he did speak, for he’s awful bad at Henglish.’

Gilbert listened attentively, but said nothing.

‘Can’t ’bide furriners,’ continued Tony, grumbling

on; 'hate their nasty ways and all about 'em. Such names as they have, too! Why didn't they christen this fellow Bob or Jack, or some 'andy name of that kind, instead of calling him as they do Guitarnow?'

'Gaetano!' cried Gilbert; 'yes, I recollect now that was one of the names I heard during my struggle in the carriage—Gaetano, Paolo. This must be a plot of Polonia's contriving, and these foreign desperadoes are his instruments.'

''Eard it in the carriage, did you, cap'n?' said Tony; 'well, I daresay.'

'Is this Italian a stranger to you—will you answer me that?' asked Gilbert.

'O yes, I will answer you that,' said Tony. 'He is a stranger; I never clapped eyes on him until about three o'clock this morning, when you was brought over; and as to answering you, lor' bless yer, I don't mind telling you all I know. Who you are, or what you are, or what you have been sent here for, I know no more than a babe unborn; all I do know is, that a party who I've had dealings before with told me he wanted a gent kept snug for a time; that he was not to be removed unless he was werry obstinate, but he was to be kept close prisoner here. I knew this party to be honourable in his dealings so far as money is concerned, and I says, "All right." And here you are, and here you stop, till he gives me the hoffice to let you go.'

'And do you mean to say you have no fear for the part you are taking in this conspiracy? do you mean to say you have no fear of the law?'

'Law be blowed!' said Tony shortly; 'I've squared that up all right; I'm an hofficeer of the law in a sort of way, I am.'

‘An officer of the law? Do you mean—’

‘Well,’ said Tony, ‘I am not in the police line, nor yet in the sheriff’s line; but I am an hoffer of the law for all that, and I’ve got a license.’

‘Why, what is this place?’ said Gilbert.

‘What is it?’ said Tony, with a grin; ‘why, then, it is a private madhouse, and that’s all about it. I mean licensed to take in any mad patients. I *have* had some of ’em here before now; so you see it’s no use you fighting, cap’n, and screamin’ and hollerin’, or anything of that kind; we’re a long way from the shore here; and even if they did hear you, they’d only think you had a bad time, and one of your fits on you.’

‘Good God!’ cried Gilbert; ‘what a horrible position!’

‘I took care to let ’em know I’d got a new patient coming,’ said Tony; ‘and I dropped a hint or two to the effect that he was an out-and-outer when he got his tantrums on; so they won’t be surprised at anything they hear.’

‘What diabolical preparation!’ said Gilbert.

‘Ah! ’twarn’t bad, was it?’ said Tony laughing; ‘that was my own idea, that was; and you’ll find it will work first-rate. But you won’t give us any occasion for any bother, I see, cap’n; act on the square, as the song sez, that’s the way we shall get on together. Now, shall it be a hegg or some ’am?’

The news which Gilbert had just heard, the ingenuity with which his capture had been arranged and his place of captivity been provided, and the impossibility of any attempt at escape, rendered him miserable to a degree. He sank back in the window and buried his face in his hands without replying to Tony’s last

question. He felt Tony's hand touching not unkindly on his shoulder, but he made no response. Then he heard his companion's footsteps retreating, and the noise of the door as it closed behind him, but he never looked up.

How long he remained in this state he could scarcely tell. He was roused from it by hearing the soft tones of a female voice ; and raising his eyes, he saw a lovely girl standing in front of him.

She was about eighteen years of age ; dark-olive complexion, sparkling black eyes, and very vividly-coloured lips. Her dark hair was banded close to her classically-shaped head and gathered into a large clump behind.

Her figure was well-moulded, and her hands and feet small and exquisitely shaped.

There was an air of breeding and refinement about her which contrasted curiously with a common cotton dress, clean and pretty as it was, which she wore.

Gilbert stared in wonder at this unexpected apparition. His look was so earnest, that the girl could not help smiling.

‘My father sent me to you,’ she said. ‘He thought my influence would perhaps be greater than his. I don’t know why ; except that they say, when people are ill and out of spirits they are more likely to listen to women than to men.’

‘Your father !’ said Gilbert.

‘Yes,’ said the girl, with a downcast glance and a blush spreading over her face ; ‘I am the daughter of the proprietor of this house.’

‘How very strange !’ said Gilbert ; ‘you so different—’

‘O, he means well,’ said the girl, ‘though his ~~manners~~ manners are rough. You see, sir, he has not had any advantage of education ; but he is always kind to me, poor father.’

‘And you live here?’

‘Yes,’ said the girl, with a sigh.

‘Your presence here, then, accounts for the care with which that charming garden is kept, and for those pretty flowers.’

‘I am very fond of flowers,’ said the girl ; ‘I have nothing else here—no books, no piano, no companion—nothing to remind me of my happy early days.’

‘And where had you all these enjoyments, which you seem so much to miss?’

‘At the convent in Dieppe.’

‘You were brought up at a convent in France?’

‘Yes ; that was when my mother was alive. But stay ! I hear my father’s voice. I must not remain chatting with you any longer ; you will let me bring you up some breakfast?’

‘I will do anything, my dear child, that will procure me a sight of your sweet face again. What is your name?’

‘People call me Nelly.’

‘Then, Nelly, give me your hand. We are going, I am sure, to be the best of friends.’

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RENCONTRE IN HYDE-PARK.

AFTER her angry interview with Prince Polonia, but little doubt remained on Dalilah's mind that he had had some hand in, even if he had not been the principal cause of, Sir Gilbert Montacute's abduction.

She was also sure that, after the angry scene of that morning, there would be an end of all relations between them; indeed she wished it should be so, as she had made up her mind to devote all her energies towards the rescue of Sir Gilbert, and the consequent exposure of the Prince.

That very night, before retiring to rest, she dispatched half-a-dozen letters of invitation to dinner to some gentlemen of her acquaintance; amongst them one to a certain Baron Schwarzberg.

Baron Schwarzberg was of the celebrated Frankfort family of bankers who had establishments in London, Paris, Vienna, and all the capital cities of Europe, as well as extensive ramifications all over the world.

The Baron's father was popularly supposed to be a millionaire. He was the head of the celebrated house which bears his name, had lived in London all his life, and mixed in the first society there.

The Baron himself was a young man of about two-

and-twenty. Though the outline of his face had the distinctly marked features betokening his Jewish origin, he was yet eminently handsome.

There was an extraordinary softness of expression in his eyes, more especially when, in talking to women, he half dropped the lids over them in a voluptuous manner; and his mouth, though somewhat sensual from the unusual development of the lips, was beautifully shaped.

He was of a thin slight figure, and always in the finest condition, being devoted to the sports of the field. Brought up from his youth amongst the nobility, he had for his compeers the flower of our aristocracy.

The unchecked command of money at his disposal increased the popularity which Nature's beneficence had first attracted towards him.

No party was considered complete without Albert Schwarzberg; he was the favourite of men and the darling of women. There seemed to be but one cross in his life, and that was in connection with Dalilah.

Dalilah was the fashion, and all young men were, or believed themselves to be, in love with her; but Albert Schwarzberg's love was very different from any fleeting passion.

From the first time of her brilliant appearance in London, Albert had been hopelessly smitten.

There was no difficulty for a man in his position to obtain an introduction to her.

The introduction was obtained, and he used all his powers of fascination to ingratiate himself with her, but in vain; Prince Polonia was the reigning favourite, and there did not appear to be a chance for any one else.

Nevertheless Albert Schwarzberg persevered in his intentions, and Dalilah could not help feeling flattered by the evident admiration with which this young man, so highly thought of in the best circles, regarded her.

To Prince Polonia's jealous temperament the eagerness with which Baron Schwarzberg pursued Dalilah was particularly displeasing. He was weak enough to show evidences of his jealousy, and Dalilah knew that in the Baron she had an instrument always ready to her hand to annoy and punish the Prince.

Still, while the Prince was in constant attendance, she had sufficient regard to his wishes to decline to receive Baron Schwarzberg at her house. Now was her opportunity.

She knew that Baron Schwarzberg was the very last man in the world to whom Prince Polonia would have wished that her affections should be transferred.

She knew that after his first outburst of rage and jealousy, the Prince, could he have been convinced of the fallacy of his idea in regard to her love for Gilbert Montacute—or rather, could he have been so hoodwinked as to imagine that fancy had passed by—would be glad to humble himself to her, and to entreat to be received back on the old terms.

But Dalilah was capricious, and had had enough of Prince Polonia.

The sole passion now occupying her was her love for Sir Gilbert Montacute.

But in the mean time the Prince must be punished, and Albert Schwarzberg was the instrument which she chose for the purpose.

There was never any doubt in Dalilah's mind as to whether her invitations would be accepted.

She knew beforehand how much was thought of the honour of receiving one of those elegant little notes with her dainty monogram in twisted gold-work, and the signature 'D.,' the only one she ever used.

Eight o'clock found all the company assembled at the round table under the shaded lamp. They were eight in number, and included the pick of the aristocracy.

When it was observed that Prince Polonia was not one of the guests, and that Albert Schwarzberg conducted the hostess in to dinner and took his seat at her right hand, a meaning smile ran round the assembly.

'*Le roi est mort, vive le roi!*' whispered Percy Fitzgibbon in an undertone to his next neighbour Lord Ballyshannon. 'Polonia is gathered to his fathers, and Schwarzberg reigns in his stead.'

The dinner passed off, as did all Dalilah's banquets, with the greatest success.

Albert Schwarzberg in particular appeared in the seventh heaven of delight.

His fair hostess paid him every attention, and certainly more than half of the remarks which she made to him were uttered in an undertone inaudible by the others.

It was plain to all that Albert Schwarzberg was the new favourite at Dalilah's court.

Albert was the last guest to leave the house.

It was very late indeed when he took his leave.

'I shall never forget this night,' said he to his hostess. 'You have made me the happiest of men.'

'And you have deserved it,' said Dalilah, with a sweet smile; 'for you have learned how to wait. Don't

forget to-morrow; you will come here on horseback at half-past twelve, ready to escort me to the Row. My horse will be in waiting, and we shall start at once. Whatever happens there, I rely on your honour and discretion.'

'You can command me to the death,' said Albert.

He raised her hand to his lips and took his leave.

Baron Schwarzberg was punctual. The next morning, precisely at half-past twelve, he rode up to the Little House in Piccadilly. He was mounted on a beautiful thoroughbred horse, bright bay with black points, which he sat to perfection.

Dalilah's chestnut mare, always the centre of attraction in the Row, was being led up and down by a mounted groom, himself quietly but excellently appointed.

The Baron gave his horse in charge of the groom who had followed him, and entered the house just as Dalilah was descending the staircase.

She looked superb in her dark-blue tight-fitting riding-habit, which displayed all the charms of her figure, and in the small hat, beneath which her tresses were neatly braided in all the elegance of simplicity.

'You are punctuality itself,' said she, extending her hand to him, and at the same time vouchsafing him a very sweet smile; 'but you see I am ready for you.'

He led her downstairs, swung her to the saddle with the ease and grace of an accomplished cavalier, and the next minute was caracoling by her side.

Baron Schwarzberg was happy that morning, for he had now attained that position which he had so long aspired to.

When they reached the Row, Dalilah's appearance at once created a *furor*.

On all sides around, the men were taking off their hats, and the women whispered in undisguised curiosity or jealous envy.

Albert Schwarzberg's position, riding as her cavalier on her right hand, was the subject of immediate remark.

'Now is the time to borrow a hundred of Cræsus,' said Fred Sorrel of the Life-guards to his companion Lord Bobus.

'Yes, or to get him to back Vengeance for a monkey,' remarked the sapient peer, who was always trying to get the better of his fellow-men.

'Did you ever see anything so horrible, mamma?' said Lady Emily Muncaster, riding up to the railings where her portly maternal parent was seated; 'there is the Baron riding about with that brazen creature.'

'Ah,' remarked Sir Harvey Mowbray, laying the reins on the neck of his stalwart old gray hunter which he has ridden for so many years, and turning to his constant companion General Buffem, 'Dalilah's gone into Capel-court, I see, now. Look out for the spoiling of the Egyptians.'

'Dam' good job too!' growled the General, bringing his whip heavily down on his charger's flanks, and causing the animal to curvet prettily; 'I hate all City men—brutes without manners and anything but money. I hope the girl will spend all that fellow's spare cash, and milk his old father into the bargain.'

So they rode up and down the Row, surrounded by a constantly-changing circle of admirers, Dalilah looking eminently handsome, and Albert Schwarzberg perfectly happy.

At length, as they were approaching the Apsley-house end of the ride, the Prince Polonia, mounted on his well-known roan cob, rode-out from the crowd of equestrians there gathered together, and made towards them.

It was evident that at first he had only seen Dalilah.

When he caught sight of her companion, his whole aspect changed, and his face grew livid with fury.

Even in the midst of his rage, however, the Prince was too highly-bred a gentleman to forget the manners of society. He controlled himself sufficiently to smile on his immediate approach, and doffed his hat with the greatest politeness.

‘You are acquainted with Baron Schwarzburg, I think,’ said Dalilah, motioning towards Albert. ‘He is good enough to be my cavalier this morning.’

‘The Baron is extremely fortunate,’ said Polonia with a sneer. ‘There is a proverb, “All things come to those that wait.”’

‘Yes,’ said Albert Schwarzburg between his teeth, ‘even horsewhippings.’

Whether Prince Polonia heard this or not, he took no notice of it, but turning to Dalilah, said,

‘I am glad to see you looking so well to-day.’

‘I am perfectly well,’ she said. ‘There is no reason why I should not be; or did you think that your absence from my side this morning was likely to cause me a serious illness?’

‘Not at all,’ said the Prince. ‘I set no such value on my presence, but merely thought the excitement and fatigue of last night might have been too much for you.’

A glance passed between Dalilah and Baron Schwarzb-
berg.

‘I have not the least idea what you mean,’ said Dalilah, turning to the Prince Polonia. ‘I was certainly not in the least fatigued last night, however excited I may have been.’

‘I suppose I may express a hope that you arrived at home without farther misadventure?’

‘It pleases you to speak in riddles this morning, Prince Polonia, and I have no inclination, even if I had wit enough, to guess them.’

‘On the contrary, I wish to be perfectly plain,’ said the Prince, ‘and I have sought you purposely to express my regret that I permitted my passion to get the better of me last night—that I addressed you with what I am afraid you must think discourtesy, and that I did not offer a seat in my brougham to you and your companion.’

Again a glance passed between Dalilah and Baron Schwarzb-
berg. The latter raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders in astonishment.

The former, turning to the Prince, said,

‘One of us two must be out of our senses. I have not set eyes on you since a little altercation, which, as you doubtless well remember, took place in my boudoir a day or two ago. I was not out of my house last night, and as you were not in it, I could not have seen you; and as regards your neglect to offer me a seat in your brougham, though of course it would be the greatest honour to me’—and here her voice lapsed into a sneer—‘to ride with the Prince Polonia, I am happy to say, that when I go out at night I have carriages of my own at my disposal.’

‘Do you dare to tell me—’ commenced the Prince.

‘Change your word, Prince Polonia. I allow no man to use such a phrase to me.’

‘Do you mean to tell me, then, that at half-past twelve last night you were not in Trafalgar-square—that I did not meet you there as I was coming out of the Union Club—and that we hadn’t a conversation about—well, about Sir Gilbert Montacute?’

‘Sir Gilbert Montacute appears to me, Prince, to be your *bête noire*,’ said Dalilah, still sneering; ‘and very envy or jealousy of him has robbed you of what little sense you once possessed. I was not out of my house after dinner. I did not leave home from the time I returned to dress until just now, when Baron Schwarzbberg fetched me for this ride.’

‘But the precise hour I speak of,’ said the Prince, ‘half-past twelve—where were you then?’

‘I do not admit you have the smallest right to question me,’ said Dalilah; ‘but I again say, that at that time I was in my own house. Fortunately, my testimony can be supported. This gentleman,’ turning to Baron Schwarzbberg, ‘did not leave my house until some time after the hour you mention.’

This was, as she intended, a double shot.

The Prince started and scowled savagely at Albert Schwarzbberg, who smiled complacently to himself.

‘Of course, madam, I am bound to believe you,’ said the Prince, ‘and I have no desire for the concurrent testimony of any gentleman; not that I think Baron Schwarzbberg would be an unimpeachable witness as regards the time; for in your society hours fly so quickly, that all notion of how the clock may stand is doubtless confused.’

‘Be good enough to descend from the regions of high-flown politeness, Prince,’ said Dalilah, ‘and come to common sense. What on earth possessed you to say that you met me in Trafalgar-square last night?’ Then turning to the Baron, ‘I want five minutes’ talk with the Prince. Will you rejoin us after we have had a turn up the Row?’

Albert raised his hat, and cantered off.

‘Now, Prince,’ said Dalilah, ‘you can speak freely. What induced you to make that statement? Do you think to annoy the Baron, or what?’

‘I swear to you, that to the best of my belief I met you, or your double, last night, and talked with you. More than that, we had a frightful row; and I left you furious.’

‘My double!’ said Dalilah to herself; then to the Prince,

‘And what was the subject of that which you are delicately pleased to call this frightful row?’

‘The man who has wrecked my happiness, and will lead you to your destruction,’ said the Prince.

‘Sir Gilbert Montacute?’ said Dalilah, affecting a light demeanour, but almost trembling as she spoke; ‘was this—’

‘See!’ cried the Prince, a smile of triumph lighting up his swarthy features; ‘see how at last I find you likely to be tortured as you have tortured me; see, you wince and writhe under the pangs of jealousy, though you have laughed and mocked at my sufferings from the same cause. Yes, this double—if so I must suppose her, since you deny that it was you in person—this double is madly in love with Sir Gilbert Montacute, and had been trying to track the hiding-place

where he has secreted himself against the wiles of womankind, who persist in adoring him.'

'And had she discovered it?' cried Dalilah.

'How eager you are!' said the Prince. 'No, she had not. He's a clever fellow, this Gilbert, so far; and, for my part, I don't think he ever will be discovered.'

'You are a bold man to pit yourself against me, Prince Polonia,' said Dalilah; 'and a weak man to think that I am deceived by what I must call your sophistry. If I were a man, and able to defend myself, I should use a much stronger term. You talk about Gilbert Montacute having hidden himself; you pretend to speculate as to the cause of his seclusion, and as to whether his hiding-place will or will not be discovered, and are shallow enough to imagine that I am taken-in and deluded by these vain pretences. All this shows me that you cannot pretend to understand me in the smallest degree. I let you ramble on, and I listen; but I don't believe one syllable you say, and you will find in time that I can oppose to your plotting counterplotting, to your base treachery inspired by hate my eager devotion inspired by love. Now leave me; it will be better for both of us, I think, that we do not meet again.'

The Prince would have spoken, but there was something in Dalilah's look which effectually deterred him. He raised his hat, turned his horse's head, and moved slowly away.

'My double!' said Dalilah to herself, as she cantered down the Row; 'so like me as even to be mistaken for me by the Prince! What is this inexplicable mystery? I had my first suspicions of it when Gilbert mentioned

having seen me in Paris, at the church of the Madeleine. I knew then scarcely what to say, but I managed laughingly to pass it over; and now it comes to me again from this quarter. My double! so like me in feeling as well as in person as actually to be in love with him! What can it mean? Where can I find the clue to it?’

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NEW HAND.

HALF-WAY down the Minories is a small street which, for the purposes of our story, we will call George-street, and about the middle of this street stands a public-house bearing the sign of The Lamb and Flag.

It is better known, however, to its frequenters by The Jimmy, that being a slang term for the sheep's head, which is the only remnant of the original painting on the battered sign-board, and which is the facetious name for a dainty dish much esteemed in the East-end of London.

Who were the frequenters of The Jimmy?

Thieves of all ages and bad characters of all kinds.

Old men who, under the pretence of keeping marine-store shops and rag-and-bottle shops, were receivers of stolen goods on a small scale; cracksmen, magsmen, burglars, footpads, gonophs, and area-sneaks.

Here the begging-letter writer boozed to his heart's content, and made merry on the receipts of which he had plundered the weak and charitable during the day.

Here the beggar flung away his crutches, and danced breakdowns with the widow of the industrious mechanic, who paid so much per day for the twins whose delicate appearance opened the purses of tender-hearted females.

Here the shipwrecked mariner let down his other

leg, and pulled his other arm out of his shirt-sleeve, using both in an uproarious fashion. And there occasionally, when some dark crime had been committed, came stealing, in the dead hours of the night, some mysterious sallow-faced man, who sat apart, and was regarded with horror even by that company; who it was whispered was wanted for murder, and who eventually would be beckoned away by the finger of some silent detective, and would not be seen again by those by whom he was now surrounded until early one morning, when he would stand high above the crowd around him on a platform erected in the Old Bailey.

It is a hot night in midsummer.

Even in the best neighbourhoods the streets are close and unpleasant, and George-street, Minories, positively reeks with foul stench and sickening miasma.

The rooms in the houses are so small, and so low, and so airless, that the inhabitants seem all to have come into the street, and there sit about, some in wind-sor-chairs, some on the kerb-stone, smoking.

The landlord of the Lamb and Flag—Ben Burdock, a broken-down pugilist, who, after he left the ring, was a ‘bonnet’ at a travelling gambling-booth and a ‘bully’ at a yet more questionable establishment—stands at his door, leaning against the post, smoking a long clay pipe, and gazing idly before him.

Ben Burdock is known to all. He is a swaggering, bullying brute, and few care to cross his temper.

There are a few to whom he is meek and subservient.

One of these is coming up the street at this moment—a short man, bent nearly double, wearing a large felt hat, long rusty-black coat, dark trousers, and old-fashioned shoes with buckles.

He glides in and out the crowd stealthily, slipping along, and receiving here and there bows of deference.

As he nears the door of the public-house, Ben Burdock sees him, and moves out of the way to let him pass.

The old man slips by him, and with an almost imperceptible gesture beckons the landlord to follow.

When they are in the passage, he raises his head.

It's Ikey Levy, the Jew fence.

'Come here, Ben,' says he; 'bend your ear down—you are so tall, I cannot reach it without. Listen, now. Who's in the house?'

Ben in very respectful tones runs through the list of the company.

'Where are they all?' asked Ikey.

'In the long room, Mr. Levy,' says Ben.

'Keeping it up, I suppose?' says the old man; 'singing, dancing, and that sort of thing?'

'They are indeed, sir,' says Ben. 'There is a friendly lead going on for the benefit of poor Tom Maunders' wife—him as come to grief, and got seven years at the last Middlesex; you know him, Mr. Levy?'

The Jew nodded his head impatiently.

'There's to be a raffle for some of Tom's things presently,' continued Ben, 'and I daresay Sal 'll make a good thing of it.'

'Is there anybody in the little room?' asked the Jew.

'What, the little room behind the bar? Not a soul, Mr. Levy; all clear there, sir.'

'Let it be kept clear, then, Ben,' said the Jew. 'I am going in there now. I expect some one to ask for me; let him be sent in there.'

‘He shall, Mr. Levy,’ said Ben.

‘Fool!’ said the Jew contemptuously; ‘do you think he will ask for me by my own name? And how are you to know, even if he did, whether it is the man I wish to see?’

‘I beg pard’n, Mr. Levy, I am sure. I—’

‘Silence, and listen,’ said the Jew. ‘The man I expect is a tall man, with light hair and a light beard; looks something like a clerk in the City—you know the kind. He will inquire for Mr. Barnet; then ask him his name, and if he says Cheam, bring him into the little back room to me.’

The landlord nodded, and the Jew passed on.

He put his hand across the half-door of the bar, and lifting the latch just underneath, went through, and entered that sanctum.

It differed little from the bars of other public-houses, save that it was closer and mouldier, and had none of the light bright cheerful aspect which generally characterises such places.

A fat vulgar woman, of about fifty years of age, dressed in tawdry finery, greasy ribbons trailing over dirty linen, sat in an arm-chair, and two flaunting girls were presiding over the beer-engine and the spirit-taps.

All these ladies greeted Mr. Ikey Levy with great deference, the elder offering him ‘a drain of anything he might like to put a name to,’ and the younger calling him ‘a dear old thing.’

Old Ikey in return was polite but brief.

He thanked the elder lady, but would take nothing; and after chucking the two girls with his skinny yellow hand, he passed on into the inner room.

It was a small, dark, dingy apartment, the walls garnished with the hideously-executed portrait of Ben Burdock as he appeared in the ring in pugilistic undress.

There were two or three horse-hair chairs and a broken-down slippery black horse-hair sofa.

On a rickety old mahogany table in the middle of the room lay two or three sporting-papers dirty and beer-stained. One jet of gas swung from the centre of the ceiling. It was burning brilliantly when the Jew entered, but he stood on tiptoe, and checked it to a half-light.

‘Not from any desire to save my friend Ben’s gas,’ said Ikey to himself, with a grin, as he performed the operation; ‘I am never economical for other people; but I hate a light—it don’t suit me, never did, and it never will.’

Then he pulled a chair immediately underneath the lamp, and drawing an old note-book from one of the many pockets of his long coat, he opened it, and began reading the memoranda therein, commenting over them in his own peculiar fashion.

‘Dick did well last week,’ said he, laughing to himself—‘very well indeed. Dick a good boy, clever boy, only too headstrong, too rash; get himself into trouble one of these days, if he doesn’t take care. What would become of him if he hadn’t me to think for him? He would do badly enough—just as badly as I should do if I hadn’t him to act for me.

‘Sledgehammer Tom’s a good un, too—better than Dick, I’m thinking, on the whole; not so strong, but much cleverer with his hands. It is not strength that does it in this world—it is art and craft; and Sledgehammer Tom’s a craftsman—never knew such a good

hand at lock-picking in all my experience, and that has been large enough.

‘By the way, Master Tom’s been rather off work these last two or three days. I have not seen much of him; wonder what has become of him. Can’t have picked-up with any new pals, I should hope. Ah, ah, talking of new pals reminds me of my new friend that is coming here. If all he says is true, there ought to be a fine haul at his employer’s, and one easily got at. Not that I believe half I hear—too old for that; ha, ha! deal too old for that; and the Jew chuckled.

His quiet laughter was interrupted by the noise of the turning of the handle of the door. Looking up, he saw Ben Burdock standing on the threshold.

‘Your friend’s come,’ said Ben, jerking his head in the direction of the bar.

‘Is he alone?’ asked the Jew.

‘Quite alone,’ said Ben; ‘he looks a chuckler-headed cove—a regular soft un.’

‘Ha, ha! we’ll harden him before we’ve done with him, my dear,’ said the Jew, laughing quietly; ‘show him in now, Ben, and I will begin the process.’

As soon as Ben disappeared, the Jew slipped the note-book into his pocket again, turned up the gas, placed a chair where the light fell full upon it, and drew his own back into a dark corner of the room. He had scarcely settled himself in his seat when the door opened, and Ben, saying, ‘Mr. Cheam, for Mr. Barnet,’ ushered in a stranger, and withdrew himself.

‘Good-evening, Mr. Cheam. You are punctual, sir, as a man of business ought to be; take a seat, pray.’

The stranger was a tall man with a light head of hair and a fluffy light beard, which contrasted oddly

with the dark complexion : he wore spectacles ; but an acute observer might have noticed that when he first entered the room he looked sharply round him over the tops of the glasses, and carried his right hand hidden in the breast of his coat. The next instant he had seated himself and folded his hands before him, and throughout the whole interview his air was that of extreme candour, almost of weakness.

‘ You see I got your note all right, Cheam,’ said the Jew,—‘ let’s drop politeness,—and you have kept the appointment I made. Now I’m a man of business, so let’s to it at once ; you can speak perfectly freely here.’

‘ Certainly, Mr. Barnet,’ said Cheam, with a lisp. ‘ I trust entirely to you, sir.’

‘ Many a better man than you has done that, and not suffered from it,’ said the Jew. ‘ Now speak openly. By what I gather from your letter, you are in the confidential employ of a merchant in the City ?’

‘ I am, Mr. Barnet,’ said Cheam.

‘ And you think you can lay your hands on—’

‘ Exactly,’ said Cheam.

‘ Ah ! but what ?’ said the Jew ; ‘ that’s what I want to come at. Bills, bonds, securities, dangerous papers ; all no good to me.’

‘ O, it’s better than that, Mr. Barnet,’ said Cheam, lisping more violently than ever ; ‘ there’s four thousand pounds in Bank of England notes in the iron safe at this moment.’

‘ Holy Moses !’ cried the Jew, ‘ that’s a fine sum. In large notes or small ?’

‘ Principally in hundreds and fifties,’ said Cheam.

‘ Better than ever !’ cried the Jew, in an ecstasy of delight ; ‘ this looks like business indeed.’

‘ You see, Mr. Barnet, why I want your help is this if I got the notes, I couldn’t get them changed, and perhaps you could.’

‘ Well,’ answered the Jew, smiling with delight, ‘ I shouldn’t wonder ; it will be a risky job, but still it is to be done.’

‘ We’re to be partners, mind,’ said Cheam ; ‘ share and share alike.’

‘ All right,’ said the Jew ; ‘ first let us get the swag. Now, who keeps the key of the safe ?’

‘ My governor,’ said Cheam.

‘ Does it ever come into your hands ?’

‘ O yes ; he gives it me sometimes to get things out of the safe, but only when he is present.’

‘ Take this,’ said the Jew, fumbling in the pocket of his waistcoat, and producing from it a piece of soft white wax, ‘ and the next time he gives you the key press the wards on this close ; it will leave an impression, which bring to me. Write to the same address, and I will make an appointment here. My dear Mr. Cheam,’ continued the old man, rubbing his hands, ‘ if you carry this out well, your fortune is made.’

They shook hands warmly and parted.

The Jew remained for some time making fresh memoranda in his pocket-book, and brooding over its other contents.

But Mr. Cheam, when he got outside the house, walked rapidly away until he reached Leadenhall-street, where he called a hansom cab.

‘ Where to ?’ demanded the driver.

‘ To Scotland-yard,’ said Mr. Cheam.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WATER-PARTY.

CONSTANCE and her maid Sophie managed to reach home safely, and entered the house without making the slightest noise.

All was perfectly quiet; not a sound was to be heard, save Sir Gerald's loud snores, the booming of which greeted them directly they opened the hall-door.

During her ride home in the cab, Constance had somewhat recovered from her fright and swooning, but she nearly had a relapse on entering the house; and it was with some difficulty that Sophie succeeded in getting her upstairs to her room.

The maid undressed her mistress and put her to bed.

Constance immediately fell into a deep slumber, from which she was not aroused until late in the morning. Looking up, she saw Sophie standing by her bed with a tray in her hand, on which was a letter.

'Good-morning, miss,' said Sophie; then lowering her voice, and bending down over her young mistress, 'You have not suffered any more—you are none the worse for last night? Ah!'

'Last night!' cried Constance. 'O, now it all rushes back on my memory; I had forgotten it; and even now

it only looks to me like some hideous dream. That fierce man, who seemed to know me, and yet talked of matters of which I had never heard, and in which he insisted I had borne a part! O, Sophie, was it all real?

‘*Ma foi!* mademoiselle, it was all real, and no mistake about it, as you will find, I think, if you look at your elbow and your wrist; they must be pretty well bruised by the force with which he seized you by the latter, and threw you down on the pavement on the former—the bad man!’

Constance turned back the sleeve of her night-dress, and found that her whole arm was much discoloured.

‘Ah, yes, indeed; here is sad evidence of its reality. Sophie, you must never breathe a word of our adventure last night to any one in the world.’

‘No, indeed, mademoiselle; nothing should ever make me. Ah! what a night! What dreadful people! The horrible man who came gliding along in his boat on the river, and crept up and spoke to you through the railings! The more horrible man in the black beard, who was so angry with you, and threw you on the pavement! It sounds like a romance by my dear Dumas; not like anything that would happen in this dull country.’

‘Truly, it was a night of horrors,’ said Constance. ‘But you have a letter there, Sophie; is it for me?’

‘Yes, mademoiselle; and it is in the handwriting of your papa.’

‘O, give it me at once,’ said Constance.

Sophie handed it to her.

Constance took it, tore it open, and eagerly perused

its contents. As she read on, a shade came over her countenance.

Sophie, who had watched her, noticed this, and said, 'No bad news from home, mademoiselle, I hope?'

'No, Sophie, not exactly bad news. My dear father is well, thank God, but he finds the place dull without me, he says. He is beginning to weary of my prolonged absence, and wishes us to return home at once.'

'Ah, but that is dreadful news, mademoiselle, to leave this gay house, and give up the parties, and the theatres, and all the amusements, which you have had, and which I have had too in my small way, and to have to return to that dull old place; it is very miserable indeed.'

'I shall dislike leaving town immensely just now,' said Constance.

'Exactly, mademoiselle,' said Sophie; 'I comprehend perfectly.'

There was a rapid glance exchanged between them, and Constance knew that her secret was known by her faithful little maid.

'Ah, you may trust me, mademoiselle,' said Sophie, 'you may indeed. I am not like that old Katherine, who was your attendant before you engaged me—stern, cross old thing! I am young, like yourself, mademoiselle, and I can feel for you.'

'I have already shown that I trust you, Sophie, by making you my companion last night.'

'Will mademoiselle get up at once?'

'Yes; I must catch Sir Gerald at breakfast, before he goes out, and say good-bye to him. You must get the trunks packed, Sophie; for we shall return this afternoon.'

The receipt of her father's letter was a great disappointment to Constance. Although she had hitherto had no news of Sir Gilbert Montacute, she felt that while in London she was far more likely to hear of him than in any other place.

Moreover, when she left Sir Gerald Griffin's, she would be out of the reach of Sergeant Bentley, and could not receive his reports as she had hitherto done.

Constance had not yet taken her father into her confidence about her passion for Gilbert.

The father and daughter were so entirely attached to each other, that she would certainly have revealed to him her attachment had it been an ordinary case. Had she met her lover in society, been introduced to him, heard him murmur words of passion in her ears, and responded to them herself, Constance would have had no hesitation in mentioning the matter to her father, and asking his sanction to her engagement.

But here, in this case, where she and Gilbert had never been introduced, where the confession of mutual love, spoken in the language of the eyes alone, had been all that had passed between them, where she even had learned his name by accident, and was ignorant whether he knew hers, the whole affair seemed too romantic to lay before the stern common sense of General Brailsford; and Constance had accordingly been silent about it.

The necessity for her return home just at this time was more provoking, because she had not heard from Sergeant Bentley for the last two days.

That indefatigable officer, the last time she saw him, showed evident traces of disappointment. Scarcely ever before in the course of his long experience had he

taken up a case of such magnitude, and remained so long without getting a clue, no matter how distant or how fragile, to the end which he was seeking.

He felt disappointed, and was honest enough to say so.

‘I am beat, up to this point, Miss Constance,’ said the worthy sergeant. ‘I am beat, and don’t mind saying it; but I have got a notion in my head now that I think will do something.’

‘And may I ask what it is, Bentley?’ said Constance.

‘You may ask, miss, bless your heart!’ said the sergeant, ‘but I mustn’t give an answer, even to you. It is rather a ticklish job, and it’ll be either hit or miss. I think it’ll be hit; if it’s miss, it’s likely to be very awkward; but it’s all in the chances of war.’

This was the conversation which passed between them the last time Constance had seen Sergeant Bentley.

Two or three days had elapsed since then, and she had heard nothing of his movements. And now she was compelled to leave Sir Gerald Griffin’s house, and to return home.

It was impossible for the sergeant, even if he had the time, to come down to Richmond. Constance would never be able to explain the reason of the detective’s visit to her father. It was very provoking; but though petted in the highest degree, Constance had always been accustomed to obey the slightest expression of her father’s wishes, and annoying as it was, she never thought of running counter to them in the present instance.

Old Sir Gerald was very sorry to hear that his

young guest was about to leave them ; and it was only on condition that Constance promised to return very soon, that Miss Griffin consented to part with her.

In the afternoon, Constance and Sophie took their departure from Bryanstone-square, and returned home.

General Brailsford was delighted to see his daughter.

‘I hope you did not think that it was entirely a selfish motive which induced me to send for you, and to ask you to return immediately, my dear Constance,’ said he.

‘I think you are the best and dearest papa in the world to have endured the dulness of this house by yourself so long,’ said Constance, ‘and it was quite time I came to try and enliven you.’

‘The place is not particularly cheerful, my dear child, when you are absent,’ said the General ; ‘but I have borne a great many worse discomforts, and don’t mind it so very much. I should certainly have gone on bearing it, but that I wanted you for a special reason to be at home.’

‘A special reason, papa ?’

‘A very special reason, my dear.’

‘And that is ?’

‘That you may have a very pleasant day. The fact is this, Constance. Our neighbours here, the Mapletons, are giving a large picnic and water-party to-morrow. They had only just heard of your being in London ; they imagined you were still with your aunt Louisa in Paris ; and when they found you were so near, nothing would serve but that you must come and be the belle of their party to-morrow.’

‘They are very complimentary,’ said Constance,

blushing; 'but why did they think of me, and why make such a point of my coming?'

The General laughed.

'My dear, you are the prettiest girl they have on the list of their acquaintance; and there is another reason,—you know Mrs. Mapleton is an inveterate match-maker.'

'Match-maker! Well, papa, what can that have to do with me?'

'This, my dear. Young Mapleton, who, since his father's death, has been rich, and who is idolised by his mother, has managed to get into some society considerably above his own rank; herein he has made the acquaintance of, among others, a foreign nobleman of excellent position and great riches; this foreigner is said to be on the look-out for an English wife. He and some of young Mapleton's other distinguished friends are coming to the water-party to-morrow; and I am convinced in my own mind that it is dear old Mrs. Mapleton's intention and desire that you should captivate the foreigner, and share his crown, coronet, turban, or whatever it is he wears.'

'Papa, how can you talk such nonsense! you surely would not wish me for an instant—'

'My dearest child, I should wish you to do exactly as you please. I thought it would be a little bit of fun for you. If this great man arrives, if he takes a fancy to you, and you take a fancy to him, old Mrs. Mapleton will be delighted, and I shall have no objection to make. If he doesn't admire you, he must be a brute of a fellow; if you do not like him, you bow, and smile, and talk to each other during the picnic, and say good-bye when you part, and there's an end of the matter; only I con-

fess I am so proud of my child, that I was anxious to see what effect her beauty would have upon others, especially upon so proud and so distinguished a gentleman as this foreigner is declared to be.'

It would be idle to pretend that Constance thought no more of this conversation.

Deeply in love as she was with Sir Gilbert Montacute, horribly anxious as she was concerning his fate, she was yet a very woman, and the notion of captivating a man of whom report had spoken so highly could not fail to be pleasing to her.

Sophie was taken into consultation. Immediately the wardrobe was carefully gone through; and the result was, that the next morning Constance came down in one of the most lovely and elegant of toilets, and her father was fairly astounded at the spectacle of her exceeding loveliness.

It had been arranged that the party were to meet together on the banks of the Thames at Walton, there embark in a magnificent shallop which had been hired for the occasion, and proceed for some distance up the river.

At noon, the General's mail-phaeton was brought round to the door. He assisted his daughter into it, took his place at her side, and rattled away.

Their drive was a charming one.

The route lay for some distance through beautiful wooded lands, then along the river-bank, then into lands again, then across a breezy common, until they came in sight of Walton-bridge, and saw a large company already gathered together by the water's edge.

Constance had enjoyed her drive immensely; the delicious air had done her good, the colour of health

was on her cheeks, her eyes flashed brilliantly, and she looked so beautiful, that when the General's phaeton drew up, and he assisted her to alight, a murmur of admiration ran through the crowd.

Mrs. Mapleton, a handsome elderly woman, gorgeously dressed, bustled up to her at once.

'My dear Constance, I am so glad you have come; and you too, General. Constance, I insisted on your father bringing you—he told you why; don't blush, my dear, you have quite colour enough without; I never saw you looking more splendidly handsome.'

'Have all the party arrived, Mrs. Mapleton?' asked the General.

'Yes, you were last. The Prince arrived just before you; I will present him to you at once.'

With her parasol she touched a gentleman who was standing with his back towards them in the centre of a group of persons, all listening deferentially to him.

He turned to Mrs. Mapleton at once, and she, taking him by the hand, said,

'Prince Polonia, permit me to present you to Miss Brailsford.'

Polonia—for it was he—had not raised his eyes until these words were ended.

He took off his hat and made a low bow; then for the first time looking up, he gave a violent start, his eyes remained fixed, the hand with which he was in the act of uplifting his hat seemed to grow rigid, and he looked as if he was suddenly paralysed.

Nor was the change in Constance less remarkable. The colour faded out of her cheeks, the light died out of her eyes, the whole scene swam round before her, and she felt as though she should have fainted.

Most of the other people were engaged in their own devices at the moment, and there were but few witnesses of this scene; those, however, were very much struck by it.

As soon as the two principal actors recovered themselves—the Prince did so very quickly, and Constance's momentary indisposition was attributed to a sudden faint—it was proposed that they should at once embark.

The Prince offered his arm to Mrs. Mapleton. As she passed the General, who was about to escort his daughter, Mrs. Mapleton whispered to him, 'Did you remark their agitation, General? they have evidently met before.'

'I saw it, madam,' said the General; 'but I shall ask for no explanation from Constance until we return home.'

The boat, which was moored by the bank, and in which the party were already embarking, was a splendid shallop with upper deck; the sides were entirely glazed, and through the glass it could be seen that a magnificent banquet was laid out.

But the company first made their way to the upper deck, which was covered with a handsome striped awning, and well provided with chairs and easy lounging seats; at one end some of the best members of the Guards' band were stationed, and it was hinted that after luncheon dancing would certainly be indulged in.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Mapleton and her party had made their way to a comfortable settee; and as soon as the rest of the company were embarked, the word for starting was given, and the shallop, which was towed by four fine horses, glided away up the stream with the

softest and most delightful motion and at a very rapid rate.

The conversation, which at first was general, soon became broken up and dispersed in various channels. Little knots of talkers placed themselves here and there upon the deck, discoursing on the topics of the day.

General Brailsford and Mrs. Mapleton soon fell into an animated argument respecting the local politics of their parish; and Prince Polonia, under pretext of showing Constance some object of interest in the distant landscape, escorted her towards the fore part of the boat, where they were comparatively alone.

After handing her to a seat, the Prince said,

‘Are you much given to midnight rambles, Miss Brailsford?’

‘I—I do not understand you.’

‘O yes, you do; I doubted for a moment whether you could possibly be the young lady with whom, mistaking you for some one else, I had a curious interview in Trafalgar-square the other night; now I am certain of it.’

There was something in his tone which displeased Constance mightily. Her face flushed as she said to him haughtily,

‘What has made you so certain?’

‘That,’ said the Prince, looking hard at her, and pointing with the gold head of his cane towards her wrist.

There, just above the top of her glove, was the bruise which the gripe of his hand had made that night.

‘I am excessively sorry,’ he said, ‘that in my error in mistaking you for some one at whose hands, as I thought, I had suffered a great wrong, I permitted my-

self to be so rough with you, that I was carried away by my rage, and knew not what I did.'

'It is impossible to endeavour to deceive Prince Polonia,' said Constance. 'In an extraordinary and, to me, perfectly unaccountable manner you have become master of a secret involving my reputation. I don't know you, but you are said to be a gentleman; I trust you will prove yourself so in this matter.'

'It was indeed an extraordinary accident by which I learned Miss Brailsford's passion for Sir Gilbert Montacute,' he said in an undertone.

Constance trembled visibly.

'O, you need not be afraid,' said the Prince; 'depend upon it, I will guard your secret most rigidly; only, as I understand from you, Sir Gilbert has lately disappeared, and is not to be found; is that so?'

'It is indeed, it is indeed!' said Constance, the tears springing to her eyes.

'Well, suppose he doesn't return?'

'He will, he must,' interrupted Constance.

'Yes, no doubt,' said the Prince; 'but suppose he doesn't, I shall then ask permission to try and take his place in your heart; so lovely a girl as Miss Brailsford must not waste her life in pining after a fellow who has gone away no one knows where. Now, with your leave we will return to the company.'

Constance dried her eyes, assumed a tranquil look, soothed as best she might the troubled beating of her heart, and rose.

The Prince offered her his arm, but she merely bowed and walked by his side. There was something in this man, she could not tell what, which filled her with an indescribable horror and loathing.

They rejoined the company a few minutes afterwards.

Horace Mapleton, the young man of whom General Brailsford had spoken as having got into good society, came to Constance and said,

‘Miss Brailsford, here’s a gentleman who particularly wishes for an introduction to you; he knows every one in London, and is the pleasantest gossip about town; permit me to introduce Major Maitland.’

The gentleman whom he presented, and who was no other than our old friend the Major, slipped into a seat next to Constance, and at once commenced conversation with her.

After a few general remarks he said,

‘You must not think me impertinent, Miss Brailsford, if I ask you a few questions which under other circumstances might appear odd; but I am sure you will excuse me and answer them when I tell you that they, to a certain extent, bear upon the fate of a gallant gentleman, a great friend of mine, who has lately mysteriously disappeared.’

‘Mysteriously disappeared!’ she echoed; ‘you cannot mean Sir Gilbert Montacute!’

‘Good God, how extraordinary!’ said the Major; ‘of course I mean Gilbert; he is my dearest friend. Do you know him, Miss Brailsford?’

‘Yes, I—that is to say, I have seen him,’ said Constance, whose deeply-dyed cheeks and faltering voice at once betrayed her secret to the Major’s keen eye.

‘Exactly,’ said he, ‘and you are, of course, concerned at his disappearance. In the first place, may I ask how long you have known Prince Polonia?’

‘Not ten minutes,’ said Constance.

‘Beware of him, then,’ said the Major. ‘As Gilbert’s friend, I will tell you that there is no more consummate scoundrel living; I firmly believe he is concerned in this business about Gilbert.’

‘That accounts for the loathing which I instantly felt for him,’ said Constance.

The Major smiled at the speech.

‘He seemed perfectly overwhelmed when he met you before we embarked. I can quite understand that,’ continued the Major, with a bow; ‘your surpassing beauty is sufficient to startle any one. But was there not another reason for his astonishment—did he not say he thought you had met before; that you were wonderfully like some person whom he knew?’

‘He did,’ said Constance hesitatingly.

‘Exactly,’ said the Major; ‘the likeness struck me as so marvellous, that I knew he must have been equally astonished. Now tell me, Miss Brailsford, have you recently been in France?’

‘I have.’

‘In Paris?’

‘Yes.’

‘Were you in the habit of attending service at the church of the Madeleine?’

‘I was.’

‘Did you once see Gil— Ah! pardon me, I need not pursue the question; that charming blush answers me in the affirmative. This fully clears up the mystery which I have been anxious to solve.’

‘And what is that mystery, Major Maitland?’

‘You must not ask me yet; I promise to explain it all to you the day our dear Gilbert comes once more among us.’

‘Ah, when will that be?’

‘When, I cannot say; but it will be, I feel convinced.’

Luncheon was now announced, and the party hurried below. There was a magnificent repast; the wine flowed in the most lavish fashion, and all seemed bent on enjoying themselves.

Prince Polonia had endeavoured to take up his position by Constance’s side; but she shrank from him so obviously and markedly, that he was fain to withdraw and confine his attentions to Mrs. Mapleton; while Constance was protected on either side by her father and Major Maitland, the latter of whom she found very agreeable, being predisposed towards him as the intimate friend of her beloved Gilbert.

As soon as the luncheon was over, the Guards’ band struck up a delicious waltz, and the lower saloon was speedily cleared.

All the company hurried to the upper deck, and at once plunged into the enjoyment of the dance.

The horses, which during the luncheon had been baited and rubbed down, were now re-harnessed, and the shallop pursued its journey up the stream.

The sky, which had hitherto been brilliantly unclouded, now began to be overcast, and the waterman who was steering at the helm shook his head ominously as he looked in the direction whence the clouds were coming.

The banks of the river, too, presented a very different aspect. They seemed to have left the verdant shores, and to have come into a dull barren region, where osiers and willows and bending reeds were the principal growth.

Presently a few drops of rain fell, and immediately afterwards there was the low growl of the distant storm.

The dancing was suspended, and the company gathered for shelter in the saloon below.

There they stood gazing out of the windows over the melancholy prospect.

Constance and Major Maitland were standing close together.

‘I had no idea,’ said she, ‘that any portion of the Thames was so ghastly and so drear as this.’

‘Nor I,’ said the Major; ‘they must have taken us up some backwater or byway where I have never previously penetrated. What a melancholy place! Look at that old house which we are just approaching; how tumbledown and melancholy it seems!’

‘It is indeed a ghastly spot,’ said Constance; ‘it reminds me of Hood’s Haunted House.’

‘I wonder who could tell us,’ said the Major; ‘it must have a history of its own.’

‘Prince Polonia knows the river well,’ said Constance; ‘at least, he was pointing out to me different places when we first started. Let us ask him; he is standing close by.’

‘Prince,’ said the Major, touching him on the shoulder.

The Prince started abruptly.

‘Your highness is, I believe, well acquainted with the river. Can you tell me the name of that house?’ pointing to the melancholy tenement which they had just noticed.

‘Which house, sir? which—Good God! sir, what do you mean?’ said the Prince, turning ghastly white, as he perceived the house to which his attention was

directed by the Major; 'how should I know anything about that house?'

'I cannot possibly say,' said Major Maitland, who had observed him narrowly, and noticed his emotion; 'I merely thought you might know.'

'I can tell you what it is, gentlemen,' said one of the watermen, who had overheard the conversation. 'That is a kind of private madhouse, gentlemen,' he said, touching his hat, 'where poor mad people is kept prisoners. They tell rum stories of that house and its owner, they do.'

'Lies, all of them, no doubt,' said the Prince. 'We don't require any more of your conversation, my good fellow, so be off.—Maitland, will you join me with a cigar on deck?'

'No, thank you; not now.'

Then when the Prince was gone, Maitland turned to Constance, and said,

'Would you be astonished if I thought I had some clue to Gilbert's whereabouts?'

'You have! O, why did you not mention it before?'

'Because I have only just now formed the idea,' said the Major. 'Don't ask another question; leave all to me.'

CHAPTER XX.

THE NAVVY.

‘WHO is that your father is shouting at, Nelly?’ said Gilbert, on the ninth morning after his incarceration in the old house.

‘I have not the least idea, milor—I will call you milor, though you told me not; for we don’t know your name, and I am sure you are a great gentleman, though they tell me you are mad.’

‘They tell you that, do they, my pretty child?’ said Gilbert. ‘Well, you must not think it until you yourself see some signs of madness about me; and as you are the only thing in this horrid place to remind me that there is yet beauty and brightness in the world, you must be kind, and sweet, and gentle, as you are, until I give you cause to be otherwise.’

‘That will never be, I am sure, milor. Dear me, dear me, what a noise father is making!’

The worthy Tony was indeed calling at the top of his voice. He had not quite finished dressing himself, and was roaring from his open window to a man who had leisurely punted himself over from the other side, had thrown a bag of heavy tools on to the shore, and was quickly following them himself.

‘Hullo, again! what the devil do you want there?’

Get out of that, or I'll put a couple of slugs into you !'
And Tony took down his duck-gun, and levelled it at the intruder.

The man—who was dressed in fustian garb, trousers tied round by the knees, and enormous ankle-boots of a navvy—held up his hand.

'Thou't better not shoot gun ; 't Queen's officer,' roared he, in the broadest of dialects ; 'I'm coom here on goov'ment matter.'

'Government be damned !' roared Tony, still keeping the gun levelled. 'What have you brought those picks and shovels for ? and what are you about ?'

'That's joost it,' said the fellow ; 'I'se coom 'ere from Ordnance-office ; they're goeing to make survey of this part the coast, and I'm to dig a hole down here by riverside large enow t'hold flag-post thirty feet high.'

'The devil you are !' said Tony.

'Ay, that I am,' said the man ; 'as it's goov'ment business, they doan't ask with your leave, or by your leave. So joost drop t'old gun, and if you've got such a thing as a moog of beer in the house, bring it out.'

'Well, you're a cool hand, upon my soul,' said Tony, putting the gun back.

In a few minutes he entered the garden with a jug of beer in his hand. He found the man had already begun work, and was digging away with energy and goodwill.

He was a jolly-looking fellow, though his face bore the marks of recent debauch, such as that navvies often indulge in.

He grinned good-humouredly as Tony approached, and said, 'Ha, ha ! thou'rt one of t'right sort, thou'rt ; hand us over the moog.'

‘Catch hold,’ said Tony, laughing in spite of himself. ‘You come from Yorkshire, I should say by your voice.’

‘Thou’rt right, lad; twenty moils fro’ t’other side o’ Thirsk. D’ye know them parts?’

‘Not I. Where’s the flag-post you was speaking of?’

‘I’se got to goo and fetch it yet. Lord! it’ll take me two or three days to dig the hole deep enow to put it in.’

‘Well, I’m damned if this isn’t a trespass,’ said Tony; ‘and that’s all about it.’

‘Goov’ment can’t trespass, I’se heard say,’ said the man; ‘leastways, I’ve always gone where they sent, and we’ve had no mess yet.’

‘Haven’t you?’ said Tony. ‘Well, I suppose I must put up with it for the present; only look here, you keep down here; don’t you go near the house.’

‘O, I sha’n’t go near it,’ said the man.

‘You had better not, for your own sake,’ said Tony; ‘there are mad people up there, and they don’t like strangers.’

‘Ah, the devil!’ cried the man, dropping his spade, and jumping up hurriedly; ‘they can’t get out, can they?’

‘O no, not they,’ said Tony, laughing; ‘you keep down here, and you’ll be all straight.’

He nodded, and turned back to the house.

The man resumed his digging.

About a quarter of an hour afterwards he saw Tony come down to the landing-stage close by the garden, jump into his boat, and scull himself down the river.

Then the navy stopped work, lit his pipe, and sat himself down on the edge of the shore, looking from

time to time anxiously towards the house. An hour passed away, and Nelly came tripping down the garden.

The navy put down his pipe, and stood up as the girl approached. She said,

‘I have heard what you are doing from my father; how do you get on with your work?’

‘Pretty well, miss, as you will see if you come nearer.’

When she came close to him, he said in a low voice,

‘They call you Nelly, don’t they?’

‘They do; why do you ask?’

‘I hear you are a kind, sweet, good girl; and that you have a tender heart.’

‘Why do you talk thus?’

‘There’s a gentleman kept prisoner in this house; they pretend he is mad. He is perfectly sane. He has been cruelly kidnapped from his friends. I want to see him, to speak to him.’

‘Impossible!’ said the girl.

‘Why? Your father is out; you have access to his room.’

‘Yes; but the lower part of the house is closely watched. There are two foreigners—horrid men—who have been here ever since he arrived. They remain downstairs; and one of them is always on guard.’

‘Damnation!’ said the man—‘I beg your pardon. However, it can’t be helped. You could give him a line if I wrote?’

‘I dare not.’

‘And I could scarcely write it if you did, I’m so bad a scholar. Would you mind saying one word of comfort to him to cheer him up in his misery, poor fellow?’

‘ Poor, poor milor ! what could I say to comfort him ? ’

‘ I will tell you what you do. Write down what I tell you, and manage to put it on his plate or his table, so as he doesn’t see where it comes from. ’

‘ What shall I write ? ’

‘ These words : “ Keep up your courage, Sir Gilbert ; a lady’s friends are looking after you. ” ’

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DETECTIVE.

SIR GERALD GRIFFIN, First Commissioner of Police, was in his office-room in Whitehall-place.

He was standing up at a raised desk, attentively looking through some reports which lay before him, and making marginal pencil-notes.

A knock came at the door, and a constable in uniform entered.

Sir Gerald looked angrily up; he hated being disturbed when in the midst of business, except for something special and important.

The constable knew this, but seemed to think that his present mission partook of these qualities.

‘What is it?’ asked Sir Gerald; ‘why am I disturbed?’

‘Sergeant Bentley is below, Sir Gerald,’ said the constable; ‘and I thought—’

‘You did perfectly right,’ said Sir Gerald. ‘I recollect giving the order myself. Let Sergeant Bentley come up.’

The constable saluted, and left the room.

A few minutes afterwards Sergeant Bentley rapped at the door and entered. He was in plain clothes, carried himself stiffly, and looked just like what he was—an ex-soldier.

‘Is that you, Bentley?’ said Sir Gerald, without looking round.

‘It is, Sir Gerald,’ said the sergeant.

‘You wish to speak to me?’ said Sir Gerald.

‘If you please, Sir Gerald,’ said the sergeant.

‘Let me see, you are still engaged on that business of Major Maitland’s—the search after Sir Gilbert Montacute,’ said Sir Gerald.

‘I am, sir,’ said the sergeant.

‘And you have a report to make?’

‘I have.’

‘Worth anything?’

‘A very curious report indeed, Sir Gerald, that **may** turn out worth much,’ said the sergeant.

‘Ah, ha!’ said Sir Gerald, turning round, ‘I thought we should get something from you, Bentley, before we had done. Now let me know the details.’

And Sir Gerald pulled his favourite easy-chair to where he was standing, sat down in it, and regarded the sergeant with an attentive face.

‘You’ll recollect, Sir Gerald,’ commenced the sergeant, ‘at the commencement of my undertaking this job you impressed upon me the necessity, not only of maintaining absolute secrecy—as that, of course, is merely one of the conditions of our business—but of not even taking any of our members into my confidence.’

Sir Gerald nodded assent.

‘You will recollect farther, sir, that Major Maitland asked your permission to take part in the search; and that you gave it, on condition that he, as you were pleased to say, served under me.’

Sir Gerald nodded again.

‘I suppose, sir, you will not be surprised,’ continued the sergeant, ‘that I have not permitted the Major to take any share in this search, that I have put him off from time to time by different devices, and that I have thereby prevented him from rendering all my researches useless, as indeed would have been the case had he been suffered to mix-up in them.’

The sergeant said this with a very stolid face, but the old Commissioner was vastly ticked by the idea.

‘I can fully understand your behaviour in that respect, Bentley,’ said Sir Gerald, his sides shaking and the tears rolling down his face. ‘I knew perfectly well that it was necessary to satisfy the Major by giving him the permission he asked, but I was equally certain that you would manage to get rid of him. Now go on.’

‘Well, sir, I have been working on my own hook ever since that, and I think I have not done badly.’

‘Have you come upon any trace of this unfortunate man?’

‘Scarcely that, Sir Gerald,’ said the sergeant; ‘but we are warm, as the children say, and I think we shall soon have something tangible to report; and my inquiries in this direction have led me into the solution of another mystery.’

‘What may that be?’ said Sir Gerald.

‘I have been brought face to face with Ikey Levy and all his pals, known as the “Jimmy gang.”’

‘The devil you have!’ said Sir Gerald, springing to his feet; ‘that is a find indeed! Why, that is the gang we have been looking after for the last eighteen months.’

‘Yes, Sir Gerald, and have found them at last.’

‘Bentley, if you succeed in convicting that old thief,

you will have done as good service as could be done by any one in the force.'

'He's an out-and-out bad un,' said the sergeant.

'It is not his own badness, confound him! That is not all—that, perhaps, is the least; for he is old and feeble,' said Sir Gerald; 'but, from the report made to me, he is the most expert trainer of thieves, and the best hand at getting rid of any ill-gotten booty, in London.'

'No doubt of that, Sir Gerald,' said the sergeant. 'It would be a grand thing to nail him.' And Sergeant Bentley put out his hand and closed his fingers involuntarily, as though he had got them in an imaginary neckcloth.

'How did this come about, Bentley?' asked Sir Gerald.

'In this way, Sir Gerald. After a long talk with Major Maitland, in which I endeavoured to find out whether there could be any one sufficiently interested by jealousy, or any motive of that kind, to desire the putting-away of Sir Gilbert Montacute, I learned that a certain party—I need not mention his name, but a foreigner living in England in a very high position—was likely to be the party who would wish to give Sir Gilbert one for himself; jealousy, as I imagined, being the cause. Of course, it was no good to attempt to get at the foreign party himself, he being much too high and grand; so I looked after his surroundings, and I found he had a secretary; and if ever I saw rascality stamped on a man's face, it is on that same secretary.

'Mr. Morton is his name, and he is one of the quietest, most cat-like, stealthiest chaps I ever came across. I watched him for three days in and out of the

kind of office place which is attached to the foreign party's grand residence, but I could make nothing of him.

'On the fourth day I saw him come out, and I followed him into Hyde-park. There he met two foreigners, villanous-looking chaps they were too.

'I couldn't understand what they talked about, but they pointed with their fingers and gesticulated as foreigners always do, and Mr. Morton he nodded agreeably when they pointed; so I thought the best thing I could do was to make off after them, more especially as they started towards the spot which they had been indicating.

'So I left Morton to go his own way, and I followed the two foreigners; and when they came up to a clump of trees, there was a little old man walking up and down, apparently waiting for them. I had kept out of sight all this time, and when we reached the trees I dodged behind the biggest of them, and looked carefully round; and when the little old man lifted his head at the approach of the two foreigners he pushed his hat back, and the light fell on his face, and I saw it was Ikey Levy.'

'Why, it is three years ago since we lost sight of him, Bentley, isn't it?' asked Sir Gerald.

'I think it must be, Sir Gerald, though I was not in the last job with Ikey; but it must be about that time. Well, there he was; and he and the two foreigners had a palaver together: and when he left them, I again struck after new game, for I know that whatever plot Ikey may be engaged in, he is always the life and soul of it, and the others are merely his tools and assistants. So I thought it best to try and run the old fox to earth; and when he went into Knightsbridge and got

into a cab, I got into another, and followed him down to Ratcliffe-highway. Then I made inquiry here and there, and I put various bits of information together, and it ended in my writing him a note and asking for an appointment.'

'And you got it, Bentley?'

'Well, Sir Gerald, Sergeant Bentley didn't, but Mr. Cheam did. A nice young man, Mr. Cheam, in a merchant's office—a little fast perhaps, and not too discreet; for he told Ikey that there were four thousand pounds' worth of notes in his master's safe, and he thought he could get at 'em.'

'Good!' cried Sir Gerald; 'very good indeed! And is this old scoundrel snared?'

'He tumbled to it like a bird, Sir Gerald,' said the sergeant. 'He gave Mr. Cheam a bit of wax on which to take an impression of the key of the safe, and entered into the whole scheme with the greatest delight.'

'Well, go on,' said Sir Gerald.

'Well, Mr. Cheam has taken the impression of the key, and has arranged a meeting with Ikey to-night.'

'Where is it to be held?' asked Sir Gerald.

'We are to meet at The Jimmy—I beg pardon, Sir Gerald—at The Lamb and Flag in George-street, Minories; but I expect from the old man's tone that he will take me to some quieter crib, where we shall see something of a good many of his crew.'

'It is a dangerous game, Bentley,' said Sir Gerald.

'I suppose it is, sir,' said the sergeant, 'but it all comes in the way of business; and I am not in the habit of thinking much about danger when there is anything to be done, as I think you know, Sir Gerald.'

'I know it perfectly, my good fellow; but there is

no occasion to run unnecessary risk. Hadn't you better have some men told off to be near some given spot?' asked Sir Gerald.

'I thought of that, Sir Gerald, but there is no occasion for it. I couldn't tell them the exact spot where to go, and I am certain that up to the present moment the disguise has been so good and so well kept up, that Master Ikey and his friends are completely gulled by it.'

'Well, as you please, Bentley, though I confess I should be easier if I knew you had aid at hand.'

'It will be most important for me to get thoroughly into their confidence, Sir Gerald,' said Bentley; 'and all might be spoiled if I were to be nervous, and a too sudden descent were to be made upon them. You see, when I have wound myself into Ikey's good graces, I shall be able to get from him some particulars about Sir Gilbert Montacute; for I have little doubt that the people who carried him off, at the instigation of the foreign party whom we won't name, were procured by means of Ikey Levy.'

'The devil!' cried Sir Gerald; 'not at all unlikely, indeed.'

'Once let me be certain of that,' said the sergeant, 'and I will back myself to discover the place of Sir Gilbert's forced retreat and all the particulars about it. Once that information is gained, no matter how soon we strike, we shall have, I hope, the power of bursting-up the whole gang of them; but we must be cautious and bide our time, and do nothing until we have learned what has become of Sir Gilbert Montacute.'

'On the whole, I think you are right, Bentley,' said Sir Gerald, 'and I quite agree with you. If you should

change your mind, and wish to have a reserve-force to come to your aid at a given signal, let me know, or speak to Superintendent Royston, and it shall be done. Now, good-day, and all luck attend you !

Sir Gerald nodded, and turned again to his papers.

Sergeant Bentley gave a military salute, and left the room.

When the sergeant retired from Sir Gerald's presence, and was making his way out, in one of the passages of the building he met with a short active man, who might have been in the prime of life, but had a singularly youthful appearance, who started when he saw him.

This was Bloxam, another detective, and an intimate friend of Bentley's.

'You here, Ned !' cried the sergeant. 'I thought you was still over in Paris about those notes.'

'No,' said Bloxam, 'I have brought that to an end—spotted the party that did it. It was the old gent's son, and he is forgiven, of course ; and here I am back again.'

'I want to say a word to you, Ned,' said the sergeant, 'but not here ; it is hot weather, and I am dry, so let us go and have a talk over a glass of ale.'

The two officers left the building, and soon found themselves snugly ensconced in the parlour of a small public-house overlooking the river. After a little time Sergeant Bentley said, as he quietly sipped his ale,

'You recollect some time ago, Ned, telling me about a very swell lady as wanted you to make some inquiries about a certain baronet who had disappeared.'

'What ! you mean Dalilah, as they call her,' said Bloxam, 'who has the Little House in Piccadilly, and

whose bracelets I got back for her once in rather a funny way ; O yes, I recollect all about it.'

'You will remember, then, that I told you not to mix yourself up in it, as it was a matter in which I was engaged for another, and we might clash,' said Sergeant Bentley.

'Perfectly,' said Bloxam, 'and accordingly I never took any more notice of it. Did you work it through?'

'Well, pretty well, I think,' said the sergeant. 'I am just getting to an ending, or rather to the beginning of an ending ; and as you are my old chum, and we have worked together for so many years, I don't mind telling you how it came about.'

And Sergeant Bentley narrated to Bloxam the same story which he had previously told to Sir Gerald Griffin.

Bloxam's face had been falling very much during the narrative, and when the sergeant finished, his friend leant across to him and said,

'It is a awful hazardous business to go among this set of devils by yourself.'

'So Sir Gerald said just now, when I told him, and offered me assistance.'

'What assistance?' asked Bloxam eagerly.

'He said I might have four or five constables in reserve planted at any place I chose to select, who would be available on any whistle or any other signal.'

'And you declined?' asked Bloxam.

'I did,' said the sergeant.

'You were right,' said Bloxam ; 'that might have spoiled your whole plan. But see here, Bentley, you have been as good as an elder brother to me ever since I've been in the force ; you have shown me the greatest kindness, and I'd lay down my life for you.'

‘I know it, Ned,’ said the sergeant, putting out his big hand, and shaking his friend’s heartily; ‘you are a right good fellow, and true and stanch to me; but what do you want?’

‘To go with you,’ said Bloxam. ‘I can be disguised; and at all events I could share your danger, and I might perhaps be of some assistance to you.’

‘No, no, my boy,’ said the sergeant; ‘old Ikey would certainly be suspicious if I brought any one with me; and as to danger—well, if there is any, I must take it all upon myself. The service couldn’t afford to lose two of its best officers, and I’m older than you, Ned, and haven’t anybody to care for me, as you have.’

‘Then you are determined to go?’ said Bloxam.

‘I am,’ said the sergeant.

‘And you won’t take me?’

‘No, Ned, no; not this journey,’ said the sergeant.

‘Very well; then I’ll say good-bye,’ said Bloxam; but as he rose to go he added under his breath, ‘I shouldn’t wonder if I weren’t pretty near you, after all.’

CHAPTER XXII.

A DARK NIGHT'S WORK.

THE Feathers at Rotherhithe is one of the most tumble-down and desolate-looking buildings in all that desolate locality.

Although the sign-board still swings creaking in the wind, its battered painting and its inscription of entertainment for man and beast are scarcely legible.

There are the usual grim representations of a skittle and ball on the door-jambs, suggestive of an alley for the pursuit of that noble game; but the alley has long since been given up, its roof has been torn away by a succession of tempests, the balls are lost, and the pins broken.

The swing-doors are all paintless, the glasses in the upper halves of them cracked, and the bar looks dismantled and unused.

At one time the Feathers had an evil name even in that evil locality; it was a difficult matter to obtain a license for the house when the police came forward and swore that it was the resort of bad women and thieves; but of late years its custom seemed to have vanished, and after its reputation had decreased and its notoriety

had departed, people were accustomed to think of it as a relic of the past, and wondered how any one could make a living out of the scanty custom bestowed upon it.

And yet, with all its outward show of misery and desolation, the Feathers flourished.

You would have thought that the two or three people who had been lounging about the bar on the evening of which we are writing were all the customers that the house contained—you might have searched the premises and found no others; and yet Joe Wedgwood the landlord, when he entered a subterranean cellar connected by a winding stone staircase with what had been an old skittle-alley, found fifteen or sixteen men assembled round a rough deal table drinking and smoking, and narrating the account of their various experiences in language garnished with ribald blasphemy.

Ruffians, these, of the deepest dye; 'longshore men, water-thieves, crimps for sailors, stolen-goods receivers, and returned convicts lying hidden.

No snugger retreat for them than this cellar of the Feathers. The sharpest detective in London had no idea of its whereabouts; and its position on the river was such, that in opportunities for getting things in or out of it which would not bear inspection, it was nowhere to be equalled.

Devil Dick the burglar was sitting at the head of the table, and to him Joe Wedgwood the landlord made his way.

'What has become of Ikey?' said Joe; 'he's late, isn't he?'

'What's the time?' asked Devil Dick.

'Close upon 'leven,' said Wedgwood.

'And he promised to be here by ten,' said Dick;

'can't have got into any trouble—can't have been laid hands on by the traps?'

'Not he,' said Joe; 'the devil takes too good care of his own.'

'He is sure to come, I suppose?' said Dick.

'Certain,' said Joe; 'he told me to have you here, and Sledgehammer Tom likewise.'

'Tom couldn't come,' said Dick; 'he's got some job on of his own, I imagine; leastwise he hasn't been at our crib for the last two or three days.'

'I don't like that,' said Wedgwood; 'and I fancy Ikey don't like it either.'

'Has he ever let on?' asked Dick.

'Not he; you know what a cunning old cove he is; but I fancy by his manner he wasn't so sweet lately.'

'Have you any notion what Ikey's game is to-night?' asked Dick.

'Not a bit of it. All my instructions was to have you here, and that you should come ready for business.'

'Perhaps he has got some new plant to propose; we have been slack of work lately, and the old man's always cranky when there isn't plenty doing,' said Dick.

'I think he must have something stiff in hand,' said Joe; 'his eyes gleamed and he looked so infernally wicked when he made the appointment for to-night; I never saw the old cove so moved. "Make him come," he said—meaning you; "get Dick there," he said; "I shall want him that night." He shook his old fist in the air and muttered to himself.'

'Well, I'm ready,' said Dick, 'and willing. There is as neat a jemmy as ever cracked a crib in the bag under my feet, with a couple of centrebits and a watch-

spring file as 'd cut through the thickest bar in Newgate itself; and if anything farther is wanted, I have got a brace of barkers in this breast-pocket, and a neddy heavy enough to knock in a skull—ay, even as thick as yours, Joe.'

Joe Wedgwood growled at this facetious sally, but took no farther notice of it.

'Well,' continued Dick, 'whether he comes or not, or however late he may chance to be, I am not going to let myself get dry; if there is work to be done, I must be in a proper state to do it, and in that proper state I can't be without plenty of liquor.—So here, Tom,' he cried to a lad who was moving round the table collecting glasses, 'fetch me six of rum, hot, and look sharp about it.'

'All right, sir,' said the boy; and in a few minutes he returned with the steaming liquor.

'Why, it ain't Tom,' cried Devil Dick, as he looked up in the lad's face; 'it's a strange cove! Where did he come from?'

'Tom's laid by the heels, and is obliged to go into the hospital,' said the landlord. 'Got a shiverin' fit and a kind of low fever, and was a-whinin' and a-chatterin' and playing the devil and all; and just when I thought I should have to do all the waiting myself—and a pretty job that 'd be—this boy, he has been at sea, he has, and he brought a line of recommendation from old Foxy, who says he is a smart lad in every way and up to trap, and to be trusted; so I took him on, and he seems to do well enough.'

'If Foxy answers for him, that's all right,' said Dick; 'else I don't hold with having strangers, even if they are boys.'

‘Nor I,’ said the landlord; ‘but if this one opened his mouth, I’d split his windpipe for him; and he knows that, don’t you, Barney?’

The boy seemed to have some idea of what they were saying, for his eyes twinkled, and he laughed as he turned away to obey some order given by a customer at the other end of the room.

‘Comes from Foxy’s, does he?’ said Dick, pondering; ‘and that must be where I have seen him. I thought his face was one I knowed.’

‘That’s it, depend upon it,’ said Joe.

At this moment there was a little stir at the far end of the cellar, and Mrs. Wedgwood, the wife of the landlord, appeared at the top of the winding steps, and beckoned her husband.

Joe immediately went down the room to her.

‘What’s the matter?’ he asked.

‘Ikey Levy’s here,’ she replied.

‘Why the devil don’t you send him in?’ growled her husband. ‘What do you keep a man like that waiting on the stairs for?’

‘He’s got some one with him, Joe,’ said Mrs. Wedgwood; ‘a stranger—one I never saw before.’

‘What of that?’ cried the landlord. ‘Isn’t Ikey Levy more powerful than any one in the trade? can’t he make or mar the fortune of our house by a word dropped to his pals? Do you think he would bring any one here as wasn’t of the right sort, and ought to come? Let him in at once, you stupid idiot; and don’t do any more mischief.’

At these words the woman disappeared.

In a few minutes she returned, accompanied by old Ikey and Mr. Cheam. The old man crept quietly up

the room in his usual stealthy way ; but his companion kept looking sharply round him on either side.

When the old man reached the top of the room he stopped.

The people sitting round, who had been knocking on the tables as a kind of rough greeting to their friend, now nodded to him as he took his seat, and many exclamations of welcome, all respectful in their tone, were uttered.

‘ Thank you, my friends,’ said old Ikey ; ‘ glad to see so many of you here ; always glad to see you when you are doing good work.—Ah, Dick,’ said he, turning to Devil Dick, who was on his right hand, ‘ more glad to see you than any of ’em.’

‘ You’ve got a stranger with you,’ said Dick ; ‘ who is he ?’

‘ What ! are you suspicious, my dear boy ?’ said the old man, with a grin. ‘ Quite right to be ; I like to see that. Always suspect everybody—not that you have any occasion to just now. This is my particular friend Mr. Cheam. Speak to the gentleman, Dick.’

‘ How are yer ?’ growled Dick, at this suggestion.

Mr. Cheam, lisping very strongly, said he was well.

‘ You ain’t too polite yet, Dick,’ said the Jew ; ‘ but I can see what it is, you are jealous of Mr. Cheam. He is a cleverer fellow than you, Dick.’

‘ He don’t look it !’ cried the ruffian, with an oath.

‘ But he is much cleverer, Dick,’ continued the Jew teasingly. ‘ You are all very well at brute force, Dick ; and you can crack a crib or prise open a pair of shutters as well as any man ; but you don’t get much when you have done it, Dick.’

‘ What does your new pal do ?’ growled the burglar.

‘What does my friend Mr. Cheam do? Why, he uses no force; he merely takes a key that he finds,—you understand, Dick,—and opens a safe, and brings me four thousand pounds—that’s what he does, my dear Dick.’

‘When did he do that?’ said Dick.

‘He hasn’t done it yet,’ said the Jew; ‘he is going to do it to-morrow for me—that is, unless nothing interferes.’

‘What should interfere?’ asked Dick.

‘Thraps! Thraps might interfere, my dear Dick! They’re dreadful things, thraps, you know, Dick.—Do you know what thraps are, Mr. Cheam?’ said the Jew.

‘No, sir, I haven’t the least idea,’ said Mr. Cheam, lisping horribly.

‘Thraps are what you call police, my dear Mr. Cheam. Thraps are your natural enemies henceforth—at least they will be as soon as we have settled that little matter of the iron safe. They are Dick’s natural enemies now, ain’t they, Dick?’

‘Damn ’em!’ cried the ruffian; ‘I hate ’em.’

‘And they hate you, Dick. There is no love lost between you,’ said the Jew. ‘Now let us have something to drink; let us be convivial.—Joe Wedgwood! waiter! some of you! Joe, where’s the waiter? where’s the waiter?’

‘He was here a minute ago, Mr. Levy,’ said Joe; then proceeding to the foot of the staircase, he whistled softly.

In response his wife appeared.

‘Send that boy down!’ roared Joe. ‘Here’s Mr. Levy waiting to give his orders, and no boy in the room. If he’s up in the bar, take care he don’t get at the lush.’

Wedgwood waited a few minutes; but finding the boy didn't come, he repeated his whistle. Again his wife appeared.

'I can't find the boy nowhere, Joe,' she said. 'What is wanted? I'll get it myself.'

'Can't find the boy!' said Joe; 'where is he got to? Go and ask Mr. Levy what he will take to drink, while I look after the boy.'

Mr. Levy was profuse in his hospitality. Bottles of brandy, rum, and gin were by his orders placed upon the tables, and the company were invited to help themselves. It is needless to say that they responded to this suggestion, and that within a very short time each had a steaming glass in his grasp, and the talk grew loud and universal.

'What is the matter, Joe?' said the Jew to Wedgwood, who returned looking very sulky.

'I can't find that boy,' said the landlord; 'young imp, he has slipped out. I suppose he's got some pals in the neighbourhood. He will have to go back to Foxy if he tries any of that game on.'

'Never mind the boy just now,' said the Jew; 'I want to propose a toast.'

'Hear, hear, Ikey!' roared Devil Dick, who had been assiduous in his application to the brandy-bottle; 'let's have a toast!'

The rest of the company thumped the table in applause.

'Gentlemen,' said the Jew, rising to his feet, 'we have a new pal come among us.'

All present looked at Mr. Cheam, who seemed to grow red and confused under their gaze.

'A new pal,' continued the Jew, 'who has been long

wishing to make your acquaintance, and he hopes to be able to made a good deal in connection with us. Gentlemen, I give you the health of—'

'Sergeant Bentley!'

A momentary tremor of astonishment seemed to seize all present, during which Bentley sprang to his feet, and put his hand into his breast-pocket; but at that instant Devil Dick, who had recovered himself, threw his whole weight upon the police-officer, the crowd of thieves surging round them, each one trying to get at the devoted man.

'Recollect, Dick,' hissed the Jew, 'no quarter, man; our lives against his; we shall swing for this if he leaves this place alive!'

Bentley heard and comprehended his awful situation. He fought and struggled, but the pressure of Dick's hand round his throat was terrific; he felt himself choking, his eyes seemed starting from his head. Gradually his struggles grew fainter and fainter; at last his hands dropped by his side, and he fell back—dead!

At that instant a thundering knocking was heard above, and the crashing of sledgehammers resounded on the door.

Wedgwood turned pale.

'The traps!' he said.

'Put up to it by some one!' cried the Jew. 'Who could it be?'

With a horrible oath Wedgwood exclaimed,

'The boy!'

Meanwhile the knocking continued furious'y.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ESCAPE.

WHEN they heard the knocking so furiously renewed, the thieves stood paralysed.

The murder of Bentley had been the work of a minute.

It was done before they had any idea of what they were doing. Their passions were roused, their vengeance was wreaked, and the detective was lying dead before them, without an instant for reflection, without a thought of what it would have been best to do under the circumstances.

Joe Wedgwood was the first to regain his self-possession. He touched the Jew on the shoulder. Ikey trembled as the strong hand was laid on him.

‘Quick, Mr. Levy; be a man! There’s no time to be lost now. What is done can’t be undone, and the traps are upon us. You and Dick must get out of this as quickly as possible.’

The Jew’s teeth chattered in his head. He made two or three gasps, but seemed unable to speak.

‘Get out! where to?’ cried Dick with an oath. ‘In two minutes they’ll ’ve smashed-in the door and be down here. Then they’ll find this,’ and he pointed to the corpse.

‘Where to? To the river,’ cried Wedgwood; ‘and you must take the body with you.’

‘No,’ muttered the Jew, his face deathly pale and his limbs trembling; ‘no, not that; leave it here—leave it here.’

‘Leave it here,’ cried Wedgwood, ‘and have us to swing for your accursed work! Not if I know it! It’s enough to have done this job in my place, and smashed-up the safest crib in London. There’ll be no chance for any of us here any more, even if we get off without swinging or being legged; but the body mus’n’t be found here, or we’re all done for.’

The fury of the knocking overhead was redoubled.

‘We have only a minute now,’ cried Joe.—‘Here, Mike,’ beckoning to one of the party who, from his large leather boots and his blue guernsey shirt had a half maritime appearance, ‘you know the way through the yard and along the foreshore. Take them with you, and leave us to chance it. You go first.—Now, Ikey, be a man. You and Dick must carry this between you—quick!’

As he spoke, Devil Dick stooped down and took up the corpse of the detective, placing his hands under its arms, which fell heavily and stiffly by its sides.

Wedgwood motioned to Ikey to take up the feet, and the old man tremblingly obeyed; then Mike, as he had been called, passed his hand hurriedly over the rough wall at the far end of the cellar. It was damp and mildewed; tufts of fungus grew like excrescences over its surface, and behind one of these Mike’s hand came upon a small knob.

He pressed it. There was a dull rumbling sound, and a huge stone gradually shifted, revolving, as it

seemed, upon a hinge, and sinking backwards, left a large chasm, through which the chilly damp air of the river blew at once into the heated atmosphere.

Through this chasm Mike quickly crept, then whispered a hoarse direction to Dick, who shifted his position, and clasping the dead body of the detective by the middle, pushed it into the aperture. Mike received it on the other side and dragged it out.

Devil Dick was the next to follow.

It seemed as if the old Jew's strength had completely deserted him. He stood trembling and shaking before the hole through which his companions had passed; but by the combined efforts of Wedgwood and Mike, one pushing him from behind, the other hauling him in front, he eventually was pulled through, and stood on the shore, as far as he could from the corpse which lay at his feet.

Then Mike, stooping down, placed the whole strength of his shoulder under the slipping stone. He heaved it upwards; but it was too heavy for him. It was not until Devil Dick aided him with his gigantic strength that sufficient purchase was obtained to swing the stone into upward revolution on its axis.

One simultaneous effort made by the two men accomplished their wish. The stone swung back into its former position; and Ikey Levy, Dick, and Mike were left alone on the river-shore with their mute and motionless companion.

Meanwhile the thieves inside the cellar, at Wedgwood's direction, seated themselves once again round the table.

'Nobody knows nothing, nobody's seen nothing. Anybody as was here made their lucky long ago. Don't

forget to hold to this,' muttered Wedgwood in a hoarse whisper; 'our lives depend upon it.'

He had scarcely concluded, when a tremendous crash above proclaimed the yielding of the stalwart outer door; then came a rush of many feet, the roar of many voices, and the next instant six or seven policemen descended into the cellar.

They were headed by the boy who had previously been acting as waiter. The wig which had disguised him was thrown off, he stood at his full height, and was revealed as Bloxam the detective.

'Curses on him!' muttered Joe Wedgwood, as their figures met his gaze; 'that boy was a plant, after all.'

'This way,' cried Bloxam; 'stand by the door, some of you. Now then, let's—Why, where are they?'

'Come, what is the meaning of all this?' said Joe Wedgwood, rising from his seat and advancing towards the police party. 'What's my house broken into and my company disturbed like this for? Can't a few gentlemen hold their club and have a private meeting where they like without a lot of dam'd bobbies intruding upon them?'

'You keep a civil tongue in your head, Joe Wedgwood,' said the sergeant in command of the party; then in an undertone, 'Which is your mate, Mr. Bloxam? I don't see him among these?'

'He is not here,' cried Bloxam wildly; 'some harm has happened him, some trick has been played him.—Where is he?' he cried, turning hastily to Wedgwood; 'tell me at once, where is he?'

'Where's who?' cried the landlord; 'if you don't put a name to him, how should I know who you mean?'

‘Where is the man who came here with Levy the Jew fence? I saw them come in together.’

‘I don’t know nothing about Jew fences,’ said Wedgwood; ‘I ain’t a-goin’ to deny that Mr. Levy—who is a most respectable man, so far as I’m given to understand, and who comes to this house sometimes—I ain’t at all going to deny that he was here just now, and that he had a strange gentleman with him. He often brings strange gentlemen; they come here because they know Joe Wedgwood sells a good glass of spirits; and then they transact their business over a glass or two, and go away. That’s what they’ve done just now.’

Bloxam looked astounded.

‘Sold! defeated!’ he cried. ‘And Bentley, what can have become of him?’

‘Well, am I to have an explanation of this outrage, or am I not?’ said Joe Wedgwood surlily. ‘How do you think gentlemen will come to my house if they’re likely to be broken in upon in this way?’

‘I don’t think you need fear about being troubled with much more company in this house after next licensing day,’ said the sergeant sardonically.—‘Here, Saunders and Martin, just flash your bull’s-eyes round the walls, and see there is no cupboards or secret panels or anything of that sort, though there’s not likely to be in this damp stonework.—Keep your seats all of you!’ he cried threateningly, as there seemed a disposition among the thieves to move, ‘and let my men do their work, or it will be the worse for you.’

The police produced their lanterns and flashed the light from them upon the walls. As they passed the place where the movable stone had returned to its original position, Joe Wedgwood held his breath; but

the wet and damp were already trickling over its surface again, and the men passed on without making any remark.

‘All right, sir,’ one of them reported to the sergeant.

‘I thought so,’ said the sergeant.—‘What do you propose to do, Mr. Bloxam?’

Bloxam was standing buried in thought. He took no notice until the sergeant touched him on the shoulder; then he looked up.

‘To do! Nothing, sergeant; at least now there is nothing that I can do but go to work at once and find some trace of Bentley.—Look here, Wedgwood,’ he said, turning to the landlord, ‘it is your luck this time—you have beaten me; but if there’s been any foul play in this matter—as I firmly believe there has—you may take your oath I’ll be even with you before long.’

‘And if it was you as fooled these bobbies into breaking into my place and disturbing my company, you may take your oath you have not heard the last of it,’ said Joe Wedgwood. ‘I shall lodge a report against you at Scotland-yard.’

The thieves laughed, but it was a comparatively feeble laugh; the horrible event to which they had been witnesses still remained in their minds; and during the laughter the police party, accompanied by Bloxam and the sergeant, withdrew.

As soon as they were gone, and the tramp of their departing feet was heard overhead resounding through the then empty street, Joe Wedgwood spoke.

‘We’re well out of that, at all events,’ he cried; ‘but it is only blown over for the present. I shall make my lucky out of this to-morrow morning, and either go abroad or take a provincial trip for a few weeks, and I

recommend you coves to do the same. It has been a narrow squeak, and that Bloxam the detective won't give up the trail without farther search. We're all bound together to keep this nasty bit of business dark, and we have the satisfaction of knowing that no one could peach on his pals without putting his own neck into the noose.'

During this time what were they doing outside—the three living men and their mute and motionless companion?

When Mike saw the stone firmly fixed in its original position he turned to his two comrades.

Devil Dick stood sullenly leaning against the wall, as though waiting for some suggestion as to what should be done; but the Jew was a pitiable spectacle. He had edged away as far as possible from the corpse, and was standing trembling and shaking all over; his cheeks were ashy pale, his eyes half starting out of his head, and his knees smote each other in the extremity of his fright.

'This will never do,' cried Mike, looking at him. 'Here, catch hold of this;' and from the pocket of a huge pilot-coat which he carried over his arm he pulled a small flask of spirits. He stretched it out towards the Jew, but the old man's hand shook so, that he could scarcely convey the flask to his mouth. A lengthened pull at its contents seemed to do him good. Mike marked his reviving colour.

'You're better now, old gentleman. That's right; for I can tell you you'll want all your strength and all your wits about you. We must get rid of the stiff-un at once.'

'Better get away ourselves,' said Dick sullenly.

‘How’s that to be done?’ asked the Jew; ‘let’s get away at once.’

‘What, and leave this here on the premises!’ said Mike. ‘Wedgwood would be much obliged to you for that, wouldn’t he? and when we have got the river so handy too. No, no; there’s nothing like water for washing out the remembrance of these kind of jobs. Take another pull at the flask, old gentleman; and do you wait a minute till I get the boat ready, and then off we all go, stiff-un and all.’

He left them, and disappeared into a kind of rough shed, which stood in the yard close by. When he emerged from it he had on a sou’-wester hat and a yellow oilskin overcoat; in his hand he carried a boathook and several yards of strong line loosely coiled together.

‘I’ll put the old gentleman into the boat,’ he said, ‘and then come and help you down with the passenger; you don’t mind being left alone with the body for a minute, do you?’ he said to Dick.

‘Not I,’ said the ruffian. ‘Give me another pull at your brandy-flask, and I would be left alone with the devil himself.’

‘That’s right,’ said Mike; ‘here you are;’ and he handed him the flask. ‘Had the bobby anything in his pocket, I wonder?’ and he bent down and proceeded to rifle the dead man’s clothing.

‘What’s this? Here’s five bob and a whistle; lucky we didn’t let him get hold of that whistle, or he would have had some of his pals down upon us, for it was easy to call them, I ’spose. What’s here?’ he continued, feeling in the breast-pocket whither the dead man’s hand had so often strayed; ‘a five-shotted barker capped and loaded! Lucky we kept him from that too,

or he would have potted some of us to a certainty. You might like to have that, Dick; it's more in your way than mine; I'll stick to the blunt and the whistle.—Now then, old gentleman, trot.'

He stepped up to the Jew as he spoke, and passed his hand under the old man's arm, then led him unresistingly towards the river.

At the bottom of the yard they found a large broad-bottomed wherry moored to a stake. Into this boat Mike assisted the Jew to get, and pointed him to a seat in the stern. The old man, who had never spoken a word, obeyed mechanically, and went and seated himself in the place indicated, gathering his long coat closely round him, pulling his hat far over his eyes, and endeavouring as much as possible to exclude all external objects from his contemplation.

He had one minute's respite at least from the contact of that horrible thing, that dead body, which he had seen so recently full of life and health and strength. True, his hand had not robbed it of this; but was not he the means whereby the detective had been befooled into coming into the company where his fate awaited him? The Jew all his life had been steeped to the neck in crime; no amount of theft, of whatever kind, gave him the smallest twinge of conscience; but hitherto he had known nothing like an actual contact with the extinction of human life.

And the sight which he had witnessed, and the terror which he felt lest discovery and retribution should come, turned him faint and ill.

He had but an instant for reflection, when he heard the approaching footsteps of Mike and Dick; heard too the trailing weight which they bore between them.

The Jew shuddered, and edged himself into the extreme corner of the stern, as the two men appeared on the landing-place with the body. They deposited it in the bottom of the boat, casting over it a bit of sailcloth which lay there; then Mike motioned to Dick to take his place next the Jew; and when he saw him seated, with the boathook he pushed the wherry off into deep water.

There was a solemn stillness in the night, only broken by the lapping of the tide upon the shore, or the subdued murmur of its rushing round the great hulks and barges which opposed its progress.

The course of the wherry, guided by Mike, lay at first among these craft, which were at anchor a little way from the shore. No life was stirring aboard of them; the bargemen were sleeping in their own homes, and would not come off till the morning, to be ready for the coal-whippers and ballast-heavers who would then join them.

When they had gone a little way and were lying in the shadow of a great black barque, Mike lay upon his oars, and bending forward silently, beckoned to Dick and pointed over his shoulder.

Dick stealthily rose from his seat in the stern. The Jew saw him approach Mike; they whispered together, and both bent towards the spot where that dreadful something lay still and motionless.

The Jew shut his eyes; he could see no more. The next minute he heard a slight plunge, and felt the boat rapidly propelled away from the spot.

Not until after many swift and strong strokes of the oars did Mike relax his labour.

‘That’s all right,’ he said below his voice; ‘the boat

rose lighter without that little load, and your heart's a deal lighter, I should think, old gentleman; at least your old mug isn't half so downcast and heavy. Now I call that very neatly done; he'll go bobbing down with the tide, and turn up somewhere close to Greenhithe or Sheerness to-morrow morning. They're accustomed to them sort of things down there. "Hullo!" they'll say, "another soocide," they'll say; and then ther'll be a parygap in the noospapers, and the coroner 'll come, and twelve of 'em 'll have some brandy-and-water at the nearest pub. "What do you say, gentlemen?" sez the coroner; "looks to me werry much like found drowned," he sez. "That's it," they sez; "found drowned it is;" and then they finishes their lush, and there's an end on it.'

As he had done speaking, a long galley, rowed by four men in dark-blue uniform, with two others similarly dressed seated in the stern, shot out from behind some of the anchored craft and crossed their path.

In obedience to a signal of the steersman, the rowers stopped their oars, and all the party gazed long and earnestly at the three men in the wherry.

After a word or two between the sitters, the men lay to their oars again, and the galley shot onwards on its way.

'We're only just in time,' said Mike. 'If we had come across that craft five minutes sooner, they'd have brought us to grief.'

'What boat was it?' asked Dick.

The Jew's eager upturned face expressed equal curiosity, though he seemingly lacked the power to put it into words.

'That was the Thames police, that was,' said Mike;

‘they’re always cutting up and down the river, and interfering with any one’s little game. Let’s see, here we are off the Tower-stairs. Will that about suit you for a landing-place?’

Dick nodded; and a few vigorous strokes brought the boat to the spot indicated. Then Dick helped the Jew ashore; and after exchanging nods with their companion, they proceeded up the steps.

By many devious routes they reached the Jew’s house; and as the old man approached his home the fear of pursuit and discovery seemed to die away, and he grew stronger and more lively; but his face fell once again as he entered the door.

‘Is Sledgehammer Tom in?’ he asked of the lad who had opened the door in obedience to the signal.

‘No, he ain’t.’

‘What time did he go out?’

‘I have seen nothing of him since yesterday afternoon.’

‘What are you growling there about Tom?’ asked Devil Dick; ‘I thought he was such a favourite of yours.’

‘So he is, my dear,’ said the Jew, ‘a favourite of mine. I want to see a great deal of him, and I am jealous of his spending his time with any one else. I am rather afraid Tom’s found some new friends, my dear; and if he has, we must get to find who they are.’

CHAPTER XXIV.

A NEW EMISSARY.

It was a lovely summer's evening, and Dalilah was seated at the window of her boudoir in the Little House in Piccadilly, which commanded a view of the Green-park.

The continuance of sultry weather had induced all those who could possibly get out to seek for such fresh air as is to be obtained in the parks of London.

The turf was covered with children racing merrily about, and indulging in all kinds of pastimes, while their parents, seated on the benches, looked approvingly on.

Here and there a pair of lovers would be seen wandering far away from the rest, to indulge in that sweet communion which was interesting to them alone ; while the tired clerk or mechanic, on his homeward way from his daily toil, would stand and gaze idly on for a minute, thinking perhaps of the days when he enjoyed the childish gambols or the lovers' solitude.

It was a peaceful scene, and one likely to leave its impression on any sensitive mind.

Such was Dalilah's.

As she gazed on the scene before her, it gradually faded away, and in place of the park, with its children

and lounging citizens, there rose up before her mind the quaint gables and red roofs of a little fishing village far, far away in the North. She saw the luggers and cobsles with their red tanned sails; she seemed to hear the cheery shouts of the fisherboys perched aloft amongst the cordage and the tackle, or the rough jokes of the fishermen as, in their red night-caps and heavy thigh-boots, they lounged round the entrance to the little tavern.

She even seemed to smell the mingled odour of pitch and tar, and fish and hemp, which always pervaded that scene of her earliest recollection.

The village and the ships, the fisherboys and the fishermen, the queer little harbour and the quaint tavern faded away in their turn, and Dalilah saw in her mind's eye a high red cliff, beyond which lay a broad green meadow, with a few fragmentary ruins of an old abbey standing in its midst. A faint semblance of herself—but O how differently dressed! with what simplicity and rustic taste!—appeared upon the scene, and to this female figure came a stalwart young man, and took her by the hand, and clasped her in his arms.

‘Poor Tom, poor Tom!’ said Dalilah; ‘I wonder what has become of him. I must think no more upon those early days of mine, or I shall go mad.’

She rose from her seat, and advanced towards the table.

On it lay a morocco case, which she took up, opened, and examined its contents.

They were a lovely necklace and earrings of opals set in the richest gold, a recent present from Baron Albert Schwarzberg.

Dalilah examined them minutely.

‘They are wonderfully beautiful,’ she said, ‘and he certainly is most kind and attentive. No one could show greater regard for me, or show it in a more charming manner; and yet, after all, I find I can only like him.’

‘Am I again to experience that passionate fervour with which I welcomed my introduction to Sir Gilbert Montacute?’

‘Poor Gilbert! what can have become of him? How vain have been all my attempts to elucidate that mystery! I feel certain that Polonia is at the bottom of it all. His manner was always so constrained whenever Gilbert’s name was mentioned, and yet he could not prevent his face from betraying the detestation which he bore to that unfortunate man. If, as I suspect, Polonia be implicated in it, he may have taken advantage of his position to have Gilbert shipped away to the Continent. I will set Albert Schwarzberg on the track; abroad he will be able to help me immensely by his influence and the respect which his name commands.’

‘It seems as though it were impossible to arrive at a solution of the affair. He cannot have gone away himself; he cannot—no, that would be self-flattery—he cannot have imagined that I should have gained too much power over him, and thus have voluntarily sought banishment from my presence. No; then Polonia’s frequent smile of triumph would remain unexplained. He must have been carried off at the Prince’s instigation.’

‘Who is there?’

She turned quickly round at the sound of the opening door.

It was only the butler, who announced that a man wished to speak with her.

‘A man?’ said Dalilah; ‘a gentleman?’

‘Well, scarcely, madam,’ said the butler, who prided himself on his discrimination and knowledge of character; ‘I should say, and I say again, a man.’

‘Did he name his business?’

‘No, madam; he preferred to speak with you, he said, privately.’

‘Let him be admitted.’

The butler disappeared.

‘A mysterious stranger,’ said Dalilah to herself as soon as she found herself alone, ‘and one whom Wilkins will not acknowledge to be a gentleman. It is as well to be prepared; therefore we will put this away—’ and saying this she locked the jewel-case in a drawer of her writing-table— ‘and have this ready to our hand;’ and she unlocked another drawer, in the front of which lay a small but exquisitely-finished revolver.

Presently the butler reappeared, ushering-in a short dark man of slim build and apparently of great activity.

He made a respectful bow to Dalilah, and looked towards the butler as though he wished that functionary to take his departure.

‘You can leave us, Wilkins,’ said Dalilah.

The butler bowed and disappeared.

‘You have business with me?’ said Dalilah; ‘or at all events you wish to see me, and I conclude that nothing else but business could be your motive.’

‘If I were in a different position in life, madam,’ said the man, with another bow, ‘I should take advantage of any earthly excuse to get into your presence.’

Dalilah half smiled, and the rising blush on her cheek betrayed her appreciation of the compliment.

‘But being what I am,’ continued the man, ‘it is of course business that has brought me here. Apparently you do not recollect me, madam.’

Dalilah gazed earnestly at him and shook her head.

‘I confess I do not.’

‘My name’s Bloxam ; I am a member of the detective police force, and I had the honour of being employed by you to investigate the robbery of a bracelet.’

‘I recollect perfectly, Mr. Bloxam,’ said Dalilah ; ‘your cleverness and energy were so conspicuous in that matter, that I asked you to aid me with your services in another affair in which I thought the skill of the detective police should be called into requisition.’

‘It is about that very matter, madam, that I have now taken the liberty of waiting upon you. You will recollect I told you that I was sorry not to be able to assist you, as the job which you wished me to undertake was being worked-out by one of my mates, the most intimate friend I had in the world.’

‘I recollect perfectly,’ said Dalilah ; ‘I was vexed at the time, but gave way to your superior judgment ; in which matter I hope your friend is progressing with his inquiries.’

‘My poor friend, madam,’ said Bloxam, ‘is no more. Poor Bentley—that was his name—is dead !’

‘Dead ! how did he die ?’

‘Foully murdered, as I believe ! At all events the last I saw of him, he was going into one of the most dangerous dens in London ; and though I did my best to try and rescue him, he was never seen again by any of his friends ; his dead body—battered almost out of

knowledge by its contact with the shore and shipping—was found off Sheerness dockyard, and there's little doubt that he came to his death by foul play.'

'I am extremely sorry to hear this,' said Dalilah. 'And he died without having ascertained anything about Sir Gilbert Montacute's mysterious disappearance?'

'I fear so, madam; and it is on that point I have come to talk with you. The death of my poor comrade renders me free to pursue the investigations which originally I was compelled to decline. Do you still wish me to undertake them?'

'I do indeed,' said Dalilah. 'Let me see, did you not tell me for whom your poor friend was making his inquiries?'

'That was almost the most extraordinary part of the whole thing,' said Bloxam. 'Poor Bentley received his instructions from a lady whom he described, and from his description of her, madam—and he was necessarily very accurate, being accustomed professionally to such matters—from his description of her I would have taken my oath it was yourself.'

'How very odd! Did he tell you her name?'

'No, madam, he did not; we seldom use names in our business even among ourselves when it can be avoided, and Bentley was a model of discretion.'

Dalilah paused for a moment.

'You are prepared, then,' she said, 'now to devote yourself to the discovery of Sir Gilbert Montacute?'

'I am, madam,' said Bloxam; 'and I shall work with double energy, because I feel that while pursuing this matter I may possibly get some certain information as to the manner of my poor friend Bentley's death.'

I have my suspicions, of course, but in our profession suspicions go for nothing.'

'So be it, then,' said Dalilah; 'you will enter upon the pursuit at once, and let me hear from time to time how you progress.'

Bloxam bowed and took his leave.

No sooner was the door closed behind him than Dalilah cried aloud,

'Again this mysterious double, again this woman so wonderfully resembling me, showing how anxiously she is interested in Gilbert's fate. Who can she be! who can she be!'

CHAPTER XXV.

WATCHING AND WATCHED.

ALTHOUGH pretty little Nelly was astonished at the change of accent and of manner in the navvy whose work she had been watching when he addressed her, she was naturally too clever and too well trained to let any inquisitive eyes notice her surprise.

Knowing as she did that the request which the man had made of her would certainly be disapproved by her father, she was yet too kind-hearted to refuse compliance, more especially when the person to be benefited by her compliance was so good-looking and so charming a man as her father's prisoner.

Pretty little Nelly, then, hid the note in the bosom of her dress, and nodding knowingly to the navvy as he resumed his work, started off for the house.

In the corridor she passed the two foreigners, who were playing some game with a pack of very dirty greasy cards, and who glanced up as she passed, muttering something to each other, whether complimentary or not, she could not tell.

She judged it was the former by the gleaming of their eyes; and though little Nelly was as open to a compliment as most girls of her age, she did not appear particularly delighted, but shook her head with a toss,

and made the best of her way to the prisoner's apartments.

Sir Gilbert took the little note and read it at once.

An expression of delight came across his countenance as he read the welcome words. For the first time he perceived a chance of escape.

'Where did you get this from?' he asked.

'From the man who is at work digging at the bottom of the garden,' said Nelly.

'You know its contents?' asked Gilbert.

'Yes, indeed; I know it is very naughty of me to bring it to you.'

'My sweet little child!' said Sir Gilbert, 'it is most kind of you; you have given me hope, and that is what I have not had for days past. The only fear I have is, lest you should be compromised by becoming the medium of communication between me and my friends.'

'You may safely leave that to me,' said Nelly, with an arch laugh and a toss of her head.

'Do you think it will be possible to get this man within speaking distance?' asked Sir Gilbert.

'I don't think it would be difficult,' said Nelly. 'Father is out, and the two foreigners are engaged in gambling. It would be of course impossible to bring him into the house, but he might come outside somewhere, where you could speak to him.'

'If he could only climb that tree,' said Sir Gilbert; 'that would give us a chance of carrying on at all events a short conversation.'

'I will try and manage it,' said Nelly; and she tripped away.

From the window Gilbert watched her proceed down

the garden, and after saying a few words to the navvy, she disappeared in the shrubbery.

The navvy looked into the basket of tools by his side, and selecting from amongst them a stout axe, climbed the tree nearest to him, and lopped off two or three small branches; then he descended and proceeded to another tree, and repeated exactly the same process; descending again, he passed by three or four trees, and ascended a large one, the middle branches of which grew near the window of the room where Gilbert was.

When on a level with this window, he said hurriedly to Gilbert who stood there :

‘Quick! I have but two minutes; ask what you want.’

‘Who sent you here?’ said Gilbert.

‘A lady,’ replied the navvy: ‘young, and tall, and graceful. I shall go back and let her know I have discovered your prison. I have no time to say more. Farewell.’

He swung himself from the branch, glided to the ground, and proceeded to the spot where he had commenced his work.

‘A lady,’ said Gilbert to himself, ‘young and beautiful? It must be Dalilah; she is still watching over me. Through her I shall regain my freedom.’

Meanwhile the navvy replaced his axe in his basket, which he swung together with his pick and spade over his shoulder. Depositing them in the boat in which he had arrived, he jumped in, seized the sculls, and in a few minutes had rowed himself to the opposite side.

Passing through the village, he arrived at the little station, where the train was just starting for London. When he reached his destination, he left his tools and

basket in the cloak-room, where he received in exchange a rough overcoat and a hat of London shape.

Having put these on, he made his way towards Ikey Levy's house.

He gave the usual signal, and was admitted.

Five minutes after, a boy, who had dogged his steps from the railway station, entered Ikey's house, and was immediately closeted with the Jew.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PRINCE POLONIA'S NEW ALLY.

PRINCE POLONIA sat in his study writing.

He was engaged in state matters just then, and the weary air with which he worked showed that he did not devote to his official correspondence half the energy which he imported into his private affairs.

After a short time he threw down his pen, rose from his seat and stretched himself wearily, then took two or three turns up and down the room, lighted a cigarette, and returned to his desk.

The sight of some memoranda scrawled in cipher, which were lying thereon, seemed to recall him to himself; he touched the electric bell, and in two minutes his private secretary, Morton, entered the room.

‘Your Highness called me?’ said the secretary.

‘I did,’ said the Prince. ‘I have just been drawing-out my notions on which the treaty about the customs duties should be based. Here,’ he continued, taking up the paper on which he had been writing, ‘is a rough draft; you can take it and put it into shape, and let me see it again.’

The secretary bowed, and was about to retire, when the Prince stopped him.

‘It was not for that alone I wanted you,’ said he.

‘I made a memorandum last night on my return home which has just caught my eye; it was, to speak to you about that affair in which Paolo is engaged.’

‘You mean about Sir Gil—’

‘Silence!’ cried the Prince angrily; ‘have you not in all these years learned caution? Does not your own English proverb tell you that “walls have ears”? Sufficient that you know what I mean.’

The secretary bowed, but there was a gleam of savage disgust in his shifting glance, and his thin moustache bristled with rage.

‘The person in question,’ said he, ‘still, I presume, remains in the house on the island?’

‘He does,’ said the Prince; ‘but I have a strong feeling that it is dangerous to leave him there any longer.’

‘Surely no one could suspect his place of concealment?’ said Morton.

‘I am not so sure of that,’ said the Prince. ‘I was one of a pleasure-party who had what you English call a picnic up the river yesterday. As the Fates would have it, the boat went past that house; its lonely situation and the dreary desolation in which it stands attracted the attention of some of the party, and among others, of that accursed friend of Montacute’s, Major Maitland. It may have been my fancy, but I have some idea, from the look with which he regarded me, and the direct questions he addressed to me concerning the place, that he has some suspicion.’

‘Major Maitland is a clever man, but hardly so clever as your Highness seems to fancy,’ said Morton, with a scarcely perceptible sneer. ‘It is, however, of course best to be on the safe side. Your Highness per-

haps desires to remove the prisoner from his present abode ?'

'I think so.'

'And to take him—'

'I cannot tell where ; it is on that point I want your advice. You remember, when the subject was first discussed between us, you said you knew a man who would provide the necessary force of desperadoes.'

'I remember perfectly ; but your Highness chose to leave the accomplishment of your purpose to Paolo and his gang.'

'Well, I did, and I think I made a mistake,' said the Prince impatiently. 'Now we will try your plan. Is this man still to be procured ?'

'I have not heard of him recently, but I have no doubt I could get at him.'

'Do so at once, then, and let him be brought here.'

'At what time will your Highness see him ?'

'At twelve to-morrow morning.'

'Pardon me, your Highness, but night is a more fit time for my friend, who has an extraordinary aversion to the daylight.'

'Say at twelve to-morrow night, then,' said the Prince.

'I will see to it at once,' said Morton ; 'and if your Highness does not hear from me to the contrary before dinner-time to-morrow, you may depend upon it that he will be here.'

At twelve o'clock the next night the secretary was walking up and down before the little door in the left-hand corner of the high frowning brick wall which surrounded Prince Polonia's mansion.

There were but few passers-by at the time, but he eyed each of them stealthily and acutely.

At last an old man of bent stature, dressed in a long flowing greatcoat and a slouched hat, descended from a cab, which he dismissed at the corner of the street, and shambled awkwardly on, looking round him as though he expected some one.

‘It is he,’ said the secretary to himself; and he stepped forward a few paces, and touched the man on the shoulder.

The old man started as though he had been shot; but a few words whispered in his ear, in the secretary’s blandest tones, had the effect of reassuring him.

Then Morton drew him under the shadow of the wall, and having taken the pass-key from his pocket, opened the little door, and they both went in.

Up the narrow garden-path, through the small hall inlaid with the tessellated pavement, and into the little library.

There Morton turned-on the gas-jet fixed immediately inside the door, and the light flaring up, suddenly revealed the stranger as Ikey Levy.

‘Sit down for a minute, Mr. Levy,’ said Morton; ‘I must see if my friend has arrived. My friend is a foreigner—as I told you, a rich Greek merchant—and he is so constantly engaged in commerce that often he does not get home until this hour, or even later. I will see if he is there.’

He stepped up to the telegraph instrument, and worked the handle sharply; but there was no response.

‘He has not yet arrived, Mr. Levy,’ said he; ‘so we must fill-up our time in the best way we can till he comes. A glass of dry sherry, or a nip of old liqueur

brandy? Ah, the latter I thought would suit your book!

Morton went to a bookcase, and opening the lower portion of it, showed a goodly store of bottles and glasses. He selected one of the former, and two of the latter.

'There,' said he, handing a brimming wineglass to the Jew, 'that will do you good.'

'Ah, that is really good!' said the Jew, swallowing half its contents. 'At my age, my dear, one wants to light-up the fire with a little something stimulating. Sherry is very good for boys, and so is champagne, that just frisks you up for a moment. They have got youth and strength to carry them on; but at my age one wants a little renovating, my dear; and I find a glass of pure brandy—none of your British stuff—picks me up more than anything else.'

'I am not so young myself but that I find it does me good too,' said Morton. 'After a drink of brandy I feel that I hate my enemies twice as much as I did before, and could do them twice as much harm.'

'You are not a pleasant sort of man to be hated by,' said the Jew; 'there is a look in your eyes, my dear, that means mischief. I shouldn't care to come across your path when you didn't want me. I shouldn't—'

'Hush!' cried the secretary, pointing to the dial, the hands of which began to work; 'my master has arrived.'

He sat down at the instrument, and interchanged some signals; then saying, 'He is ready for us,' he rose, and led Ikey through the passage into the Prince's apartment.

The Prince was lying on a sofa at the far end of

the room ; but the light was so disposed as to throw him entirely into the shadow, while its rays were reflected full upon the Jew.

The latter entered the room cringingly, and made deep obeisance of humility.

‘This is Mr. Levy, sir, of whom I spoke,’ said Morton. ‘I have told him that you are inclined to place the utmost confidence in him, and that he may speak with the fullest freedom before you. I have also told him that he will be well paid for whatever he undertakes.’

The Prince nodded ; then addressed himself to the Jew, and said,

‘Has this gentleman explained the nature of the business to you, Mr. Levy?’

‘No, sir,’ replied the Jew ; ‘he merely gave me a sort of idea that he wanted something done of which—well, perhaps the police would not entirely approve.’

‘Exactly,’ said the Prince ; ‘but as there is to be confidence between us, we must speak plainly. The fact is, there is a man who is personally obnoxious to me ; and I want him put out of the way.’

‘Not ki-lled!’ cried the Jew in a wild state of excitement. ‘No, no, not that—that could not be ; no more blood ! no more motionless dead bodies ! no more—O no, not that, not that !’

‘You are exciting yourself perfectly unnecessarily,’ said the Prince, looking at him with contempt ; ‘there’s no person to be killed, and no question of a dead body in the matter. My business is simply this :—the person of whom I have already spoken as obnoxious to myself is at present confined in a place which is scarcely so secret as it might be, and which, I imagine, is al-

ready beginning to be suspected : it is our object, therefore, to remove him thence as quickly as possible. You have been indicated to me as the man likely to be able to find another place of retreat more secure, and less liable to be found out. Have I been correctly informed ?

‘ Well, sir, I think so,’ said the Jew, after pondering a minute ; ‘ I think I might be able to manage the matter for you ; but I can’t speak straight off at once, without reflecting over the business. There are all sorts of kens and cribs which I know of ; but this is a particular case, and must be treated specially. Not that there is a doubt but what I shall be able to manage it ; but I cannot give you an answer at once.’

‘ Good,’ said the Prince ; ‘ but you must let me have it as speedily as possible, since delays are proverbially dangerous, and we have quick-witted and active opponents to deal with. So soon as you have decided, you will let this gentleman know,’ and he pointed to Morton.

‘ I shall have to ask a stiffish price for this job, gentlemen,’ said Ikey Levy, his eyes gleaming with avarice. ‘ You see it is rather a ticklish business, and I shall not only have to provide a place for the gentleman to be kept in, but the people to keep him there. I couldn’t trust any one else. And he may show fight.—Do you think he would show fight, sir ?’ he asked the Prince.

‘ I should think it remarkably likely,’ was the reply.

‘ There ! that’s just what I thought,’ said the Jew ; ‘ high-spirited gentlemen generally does show fight ; and the most of ’em can use their fists splendidly ; and my people will have to run the chance of getting knocked

about. I shall have to take all that into consideration in the price I ask you.'

'You need not fear for your money, sir,' said the Prince haughtily; 'you will be paid what you ask. Now there is nothing more, I think, to be said?'

And he rose, showing that he wished the interview to terminate.

As Morton was walking with the Jew down the gravel path leading to the little door in the wall, he said,

'You did quite right to ask about your money; but you need not be afraid: my master is very rich; he is one of the richest Greek merchants in London.'

'O yes,' said the Jew, with a sneering laugh; 'he is a Greek merchant, I know.'

'What do you mean?' said Morton, turning upon him.

'I saw the coronet and the monogram on his chairs, my dear; and Greek merchants always have coronets, we know. Ha, ha! never mind, I am safe, my dear; I am quite safe.'

'You had better be safe and secret as the grave,' whispered Morton.

'Yes, my dear, yes, quite safe. Don't talk about graves, though—nasty subject; I can't bear to think of anything of that kind. You shall hear from me in the course of to-morrow or the next day.'

And Morton, having opened the door, the old man nodded and went his way.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONSTANCE RECEIVES INTELLIGENCE.

GENERAL BRAILSFORD did his best to make the old house at Richmond a pleasant place of sojourn for his daughter.

As has been previously intimated, the General himself had seen a great deal of the world in his youth in all its various phases, and was an excellent companion, bright, genial, and full of anecdote.

He was remarkably fond of the society of young people, and gave Constance *carte blanche* to invite whom she pleased to the house, to give little parties whenever she chose, and to accept all the invitations of her friends.

So that the time would have passed sufficiently agreeably had Constance's heart been free.

But in it the image of Sir Gilbert Montacute was enshrined. She was always thinking of him, and wondering what had become of him; she was greatly surprised and annoyed at never having heard from her mysterious correspondent, who had promised to devote all his energies to her service.

Neither had she seen anything lately of Major Maitland, and she relied very much on the Major's perseverance and friendship for Gilbert to aid her in her search.

She had often thought over that singular episode in the water-party in which they had all been engaged.

As she passed the various incidents in review before her, she thought there could be no doubt that Prince Polonia had betrayed sufficient uneasiness at the sight of that lone house by the river, and at the questions which were asked him concerning it, to warrant Major Maitland in supposing there was something mysterious in connection with the place, which the Prince knew of, but would not divulge.

It seemed to Constance, however, a great stretch of imagination to take it for granted that that something must have relation to Sir Gilbert.

The Prince might have a knowledge of the house, and a reason for concealing it, quite independent of those with which Major Maitland accredited him.

It was a madhouse, they had said on board, and some relatives or friends of the Prince might have been confined there, which alone would give it a melancholy interest to him.

Before it was assigned to its present use it might have been the residence of some one whom he had dearly loved and perhaps lost, which would also account for his feelings.

But then again she recollected Major Maitland had warned her that the Prince had an inveterate hatred for Gilbert, and was jealous of him.

Jealous of him ! with whom ? There must be some woman in the case—some woman in whose love these two men are rivals.

Constance did not like to think of that ; but the idea would perpetually intrude itself upon her, and it caused her more real sorrow than any of those other fleeting

reveries in which she was in the habit of indulging about her absent lover.

It would have been better for her if she had had some one to take into her confidence to talk to about her hopes and fears—some one who could listen to the strange story of a lover who had never spoken to her, whom she had only seen once, and from whom she had had but one long passionate look.

But there was no one in this position, and Constance had to bear her burden of troubles by herself.

Her father was so kind, so thoroughly entered into all her ways, and understood her so completely like a brother, that had the affair been one of a less romantic description, had she met Gilbert in society and been properly introduced to him, had he then and there proffered his suit, she would certainly have taken General Brailsford into her confidence; but being as it was, she was afraid he would laugh at it as the mere silly imagination of a romantic girl.

So she kept it all to herself.

One morning when she was out riding in Richmond-park, attended only by a groom, she saw a gentleman rapidly making towards her, and on his nearer approach he took off his hat, and Constance recognised Major Maitland.

He checked his horse and rode up beside her. After a little formal conversation, he said :

‘ You recollect, my dear Miss Brailsford, the last occasion on which we met ? ’

‘ Perfectly,’ said Constance.

‘ The picnic given by the Mapletons, I mean.’

‘ Yes,’ said Constance ; ‘ I remember well the water-party, the dinner, the dancing on the barge.’

‘And that wonderful old house on the island—you have not forgotten that?’ said the Major earnestly.

‘No, indeed!’ said Constance, shuddering; ‘I often think of it, and never without trembling. A madhouse they said it was.’

‘Yes,’ said the Major with marked emphasis, ‘they said so; but one does not believe all one hears.’

‘Major Maitland,’ said Constance, looking at him earnestly, ‘our acquaintance is not of long date, but I know you to be a gentleman, and I am sure you will respect the confidence I am about to place in you by speaking thus freely to you. When we were on that pleasure-barge, and passing that dreary-looking habitation, you told me you had certain suspicions, but that you could not enter into them just then.’

‘Exactly,’ said the Major. ‘If you recollect, that accomplished scoundrel Prince Polonia was standing by.’

‘I thought that was your reason,’ said Constance. ‘I have somehow an innate horror of that man.’

‘Your antipathy to him is, I believe, well-founded,’ said the Major.

‘And why?’ asked Constance.

‘Because I hold him to be the personal enemy of Sir Gilbert Montacute.’

Constance blushed deeply. She saw that by one person at least her secret was discovered.

‘What reason have you to think this?’ she said.

‘I have not merely reason, but excellent proofs. I knew the Prince hated Gilbert, and I have always had a strong idea that he was instrumental in procuring our poor friend’s kidnapping; but a more extraordinary notion entered into my head on that day of the party of which we were speaking.’

‘And that was—?’

‘The idea that Gilbert was prisoner in that lonely house on the island.’

‘Good heavens!’ cried Constance; ‘what made you imagine that?’

‘An inward presentiment, nothing more; unless it were detecting a look which passed over Polonia’s face when we asked him about the house.’

‘I saw that look myself,’ said Constance; ‘but such an idea never crossed my mind. Have you taken any steps to satisfy yourself whether your suspicions were correct?’

‘I have done all I could in the matter; but that was little enough. I relied principally upon the assistance of a very clever detective sergeant whom I had previously employed in the matter.’

‘Of course, Sergeant Bentley?’

‘Did you know him, Miss Brailsford?’

‘He had served under my father, and nursed me when I was a child.’

‘You will be sorry to hear that he is dead,’ said Major Maitland.

‘Dead!’ cried Constance; ‘why, I saw him only the other day.’

‘He disappeared some short time since, and his body was afterwards found in the river near the Nore.’

‘He could not have committed suicide; he must have fallen in by accident.’

‘Worse than that, my dear Miss Brailsford,’ said the Major solemnly. ‘It is confidently believed at Scotland-yard that he was foully murdered in the execution of his duty.’

‘How horrible! how very horrible!’ cried Con-

stance, dropping her reins and covering her face with her hands. 'Poor Bentley! He was so brave, so clever, so devoted!'

'He was indeed,' said Major Maitland; 'it will be difficult to replace him. You see, that when poor Bentley's services were not available, I endeavoured to do as best I could myself; but it is plain my abilities are not in the detective line; I could not even find the house!'

'Could not find the house?'

'No; though I took a boat and had myself rowed to what I thought was the neighbourhood. It lies up some creek, I suppose; and the boatmen could not or would not take me to it.'

'So that you are entirely without news?'

'Entirely. Had I had any, I should have seen you before; as it is, I was coming to you to tell you of my ill-success.'

'I know it is not from any want of zeal, Major, or any lack of affection for Sir Gilbert that you have as yet failed in discovering where he is.'

'You may say that truly, Miss Brailsford,' said the Major; 'and you may add, that it is not from any want of antipathy to the Prince Polonia. However, I have no doubt Fortune will favour us soon; she has looked so blackly upon us ever since the commencement of our search, that she must lend us the light of her countenance before long. Depend upon my letting you know the moment I hear anything worth communicating.'

And the Major took off his hat, and bending to the saddle-bow, clapped spurs to his horse, and galloped off.

Constance turned her horse's head, and wended her

way slowly homeward. Her thoughts, not too bright or lively before, had been very much saddened by what Major Maitland had told her.

Could his suspicions be correct? could Gilbert be immured in that dark, dreary, lonely house, which seemed a fit spot for the perpetration of any crime, or for the reception of any one whose existence was to be kept hidden from the world?

And the Prince Polonia too,—were Major Maitland's suspicions justified as regarded him?

Constance owned to herself that she had felt a kind of innate repugnance to the man; but she thought that might perhaps have been on account of the libertine character which the world accorded to him, and of a certain amount of freedom and boldness in his manner to women, which she had marked, and of which she highly disapproved.

It had never occurred to her to couple the Prince with Sir Gilbert's disappearance; but Major Maitland was a man of the world, and he spoke of it with a degree of certainty which he would scarcely have used had he not had some good ground for his assertions.

In that lonely house! What a dreadful position for a man of his birth and previous habits! How could he be got at? That was her one thought.

She must herself undertake the mission.

She was a woman, weak and wavering, but in this matter she should be found firm and strong.

Poor Bentley dead! To whom could she turn for assistance? since she must have assistance in the matter.

If she had only had Bentley's aid, she would have undertaken to discover this lone house, and perhaps

to penetrate its mysteries; but what should she do now?

Pondering over these things in her mind, Constance arrived at her own gate, and rode slowly into the stable-yard.

The groom came forward and took her horse, and she sprang lightly from the saddle.

She was welcomed with uproarious manifestations of delight by Lion and Sultan, the two splendid Mount St. Bernard dogs, who rushed to the end of their chains, and stood on their hind legs pawing the air, as though desiring to embrace their lovely young mistress.

Constance patted and fondled them both, and then leaving the stable-yard, proceeded through the garden to the house.

But she had not got more than half-way when there arose another terrible outcry from the dogs; this time not in welcome or in play, but in deep growls of savage rage.

Constance looked round to see what had raised this clamour, but could not understand it until she saw, just over the hedge dividing the garden from the road, a man, dressed in a worn and shabby velveteen suit, with a battered white hat on his head, and a couple of toy terrier dogs, one under each arm.

When he caught her eye, the man touched his hat as well as he could with these encumbrances, and beckoned her to approach the gate.

She, thinking he wished to dispose of one of his dogs, shook her head negatively.

But he renewed his gesture, which she seemed somehow to recognise.

She stepped to the gate, and knew him in an in-

stant ; it was her mysterious correspondent the burglar, the man who had met her at the river steps, and promised to aid her in her search for Sir Gilbert.

‘ You recollect me, miss ? ’ he said hurriedly. ‘ That’s right. I thought I’d come up here in these clothes, and bring these two dogs, to give me a chance to speak with yer without bein’ pertik’ler noticed. I had a mortal deal of trouble to find yer out here, and a precious sight more to be able to get yer the noose yer wanted ; but I’d do that or anythin’ else to serve you, who wurz so kind to me, Lord love yer !—and I’ve done it.’

‘ You are a good and true fellow,’ said Constance, ‘ and shall not be without your reward.’

‘ My reward’s in serving you ; I don’t want no other,’ said the man. ‘ But I’ve not got no time to spare, and I must git on as quick as possible. Well, then, the gentle—’

He paused abruptly, and commenced saying,

‘ Buy a dorg, miss ? This beautiful black-and-tan terrier ! A fust-rate un at rats, miss. Buy him, do.’

Constance looked up to see what had caused this alteration in his demeanour ; but she could only see an old woman approaching them with slow steps—a short stout woman, and with—as well as could be seen through her veil—a very red face. She carried a thick umbrella, and seemed thoroughly fatigued and out of breath.

As she approached the spot where the dog-dealer was standing, she paused ; but seeing Constance, she walked on to the gate and dropped a curtsy.

‘ You don’t recollect me, miss,’ she said ; ‘ but I am Mrs. Stagg, from Kew, and have walked over to see my girl as is teacher at the infant-school ; and here I am, regular dead beat, and flustered with the heat, and get

farther another step I can't, and that's all about it; so, with your good leave, I will just sit down on this bank until I catch my breath again.'

'Do, my good woman, by all means,' said Constance. 'Would you like a glass of water or a glass of wine?'

'Not a drop of nothing,' said Mrs. Stagg, 'bless your kind heart all the same. Only let me sit here and catch my breath. You go on with what you was a-talking about; though I wouldn't buy a dog if I was you, as is well known that most dog-dealers is dog-stealers and wagabones.'

Constance laughed, and the man laughed too; then he went on with his narrative.

He told her how, after immense trouble and perseverance, he had discovered that Sir Gilbert was immured in the house on the river. How he had disguised himself as a navvy, and obtained certain personal evidence of the fact, and confirmation of his suspicions. How, through the medium of Nelly, he had put himself into communication with the prisoner, and told him that his friends, and especially one lady, were watching over him; and how, finally, he had managed to get an interview with Sir Gilbert.

Constance was very much moved at this recital. She was more especially astonished when she found that Major Maitland's suspicions had been correct, and that she herself had actually looked upon the house in which her beloved was imprisoned.

She then asked her mysterious friend what he proposed to do; whether he could readily find the house again.

He gave her an accurate description of where it lay,

and the best means of approaching to it; but conjured her to take no steps until he should see her again. He was devoted to her service, as he had proved himself; but nothing must be done rashly, or all their past labour would be thrown away.

Constance pledged herself to this; and it was agreed between them that in a few days the man should come down either in that or some other disguise suitable to his purpose; then he touched his hat and took his leave.

After he had gone, Constance, though her mind was very full, turned towards the bank where Mrs. Stagg was still sitting, and asked that good old soul whether she would not come in and have a cup of tea.

Mrs. Stagg, however, again refused, and said she was afraid she should be compelled to go back to Kew in 'one of them botherin' homnibuses.'

One of these vehicles coming up just at the time, the old woman, thanking Constance again, and curtseying, bundled into it.

There she sat with her veil down in all the heat, groaning and grunting, until she stopped the omnibus close by Dalilah's house in Piccadilly.

The mistress of the house had just descended from her carriage and was going in.

Mrs. Stagg followed her closely, and it was not until she reached her own room that Dalilah perceived any one was on her heels.

She turned round angrily; but the expression of her face changed in a moment as the old woman, pulling off her bonnet and wig, stood revealed as Bloxam the detective!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BLOXAM REPORTS.

DALILAH turned faint for the moment at the sight of the unexpected apparition, but immediately recovered her self-possession.

‘ You recollect me, madam,’ cried the man ;—
‘ Bloxam, the—’

‘ Quite well,’ said Dalilah. ‘ You took me a little off my guard, and I confess at first I was astonished. Now I recollect you perfectly, and the business on which you are employed. You have news ?’

‘ I have.’

‘ I guessed so, or you would not be here in this disguise. Have you discovered the place of Sir Gilbert’s imprisonment ?’

‘ I have heard it accurately described.’

‘ By whom ?’

‘ By a man who was obviously disguised, and very well disguised too, but whose features seemed to be familiar to me. I have not had time to think him out yet, but I shall do so in the first leisure moment. He is a thief, I think ; but at all events he is on an honest lay now.’

‘ What do you mean ? How was he employed ?’

‘ He seemed to have been doing much the same

business as poor Bentley and myself—that is, looking after Sir Gilbert; only he has had more success than either of us.’

‘Who was he employed by?—a woman?’

‘Yes, ma’am,’ said Bloxam, ‘a woman, though I should have said a lady; and if I hadn’t known that you were engaged otherwise, and not likely to be in that locality, I could have taken my solemn davy it was you—face, figure, features, movements, actions, all exactly alike.’

‘Again!’ said Dalilah beneath her breath; ‘the same mysterious double of myself, and still engaged in seeking for him—seeking successfully too, it would seem, though perhaps we now have equal chances.—Well, Bloxam, what did you learn?’

‘That Sir Gilbert was hidden away in a lonely house on an island far up the Thames, the situation of which the man so accurately described to the lady, that I flatter myself with the aid of an intelligent waterman I shall be able to find it, though at present I have never set eyes upon it. I learned also that this man—who seems a deuced clever fellow—had managed to get on to the island in the disguise of a navvy, and, under the pretence of having some work to do there, that he had found means to convey a letter to Sir Gilbert, and actually to enter into a personal communication with him. Now I call that regularly clever.’

‘It is indeed,’ said Dalilah. ‘Did you hear the substance of the communication?’

‘He merely informed Sir Gilbert that he came from the lady—that she was watching over him—and by her aid he would effect his escape.’

‘Confusion!’ cried Dalilah hastily; ‘by *her* aid!

That shall never be! It is to be by mine, and mine alone, that Gilbert Montacute quits the place where he is now imprisoned. Did you learn at whose instigation or by whose act this unfortunate gentleman was kidnapped?

‘I heard this fellow say he understood there were two foreigners constantly on guard at the house.’

‘Foreigners!’ cried Dalilah; ‘then my suspicions are confirmed. Sir Gilbert is the victim of an intrigue, plotted and planned and carried out by a man in high position, utterly unscrupulous, with great power and the command of vast wealth. He will do all he can to prevent the whereabouts of his prisoner being discovered, or even if it were discovered, to prevent him from gaining his freedom. You hear what I say, Bloxam; do you think we shall be able to cope with this man?’

‘Leave Richard Bloxam alone for coping with him, ma’am, if he was as rich as Rothschild, or as great as Julius Cæsar,’ cried the detective. ‘Only once get a perfect knowledge of this place, and we’ll have Sir Gilbert out before you can say “knife!” There is nothing shall stop us when once we know exactly where he is.’

‘I am glad to hear you speak so cheerily,’ said Dalilah. ‘You will want all your cunning and all your nerve in this matter, depend upon it. For this you must look to yourself. You will want funds too, and for this I am responsible.’

She opened a drawer in her writing-table, and taking therefrom a bundle of bank notes, counted out fifty pounds and handed them to the detective.

‘Thank you, ma’am,’ said Bloxam, pocketing the money; ‘I don’t think I shall want anything like this

sum, but I'll keep an exact account, and tell you about it when we finally square up. By the way, ma'am, you will pardon me, but do you generally keep money like that in that drawer ?'

'Always,' said Dalilah. 'Why not ?'

'Rather a loose way of doing it, is it not, madam ? You see your window's very often open, and your blind is very seldom down ; and people going by on omnibuses and that like can almost see into the room. It would not take much for one of those swell-mobsmen to get himself up in his best toggery, watch you out, then come, knock at the door, pretend he was a friend of yours and would wait till you came back ; and then—why, almost with a penknife he could turn the catch of this lock, pocket the flimsies, and make his lucky in a minute.'

'Thanks for your warning,' said Dalilah with a smile. 'It is certainly a somewhat imprudent place, and I will find a safer one in future.—By the way,' she added, as the smile died away from her mouth, and her face became almost stern, 'this lady of whom you were speaking—she was very like me ?'

'Wonderfully like—the exact image ; two cherries couldn't be more like each other.'

'And her name—did you learn her name ?'

'Yes, ma'am ; she's called Miss Brailsford—Miss Constance Brailsford, daughter of General Brailsford, who lives at Richmond.'

Dalilah took a memorandum-book from her desk, and wrote in it, repeating aloud, 'Constance Brailsford, daughter of General Brailsford, living at Richmond. I shall not forget that name.—Now, Bloxam, what do you propose to do ?'

‘I propose at once to go and find out the position of this place, then to reconnoitre it thoroughly and learn exactly how it is guarded, what number of men are on the premises, and what chance there is of making our way in. I shall probably want three or four men with me when it comes to the final push.’

‘So soon as you have gained all the information you require, and before you make what you call the final push,’ said Dalilah, ‘let me know; I may wish to go with you.’

‘It will be scarcely the kind of job for you to be mixed up in, ma’am,’ said Bloxam.

‘That’s my business,’ said Dalilah haughtily. Then in a different tone, ‘I must be first in this matter, Bloxam. Miss Constance Brailsford,’ she added with a sneer, ‘must not have the satisfaction of rescuing Sir Gilbert Montacute.’

‘All right, ma’am,’ said Bloxam; ‘I see exactly how the land lies, and you may depend upon my giving you the earliest information in my power.’

When Bloxam was gone, Dalilah sat herself down to think over all the news he had told her, and to determine upon her plans.

At last, then, she had succeeded in discovering the name and position of this mysterious person who so wonderfully resembled her, not merely in form and feature, but in her attachment and devotion to Sir Gilbert Montacute.

Constance! Constance Brailsford, daughter of General Brailsford! She must, then, be a girl moving in society, such society as Gilbert would not be ashamed to mix in, and in which he would be likely to find the woman whom he would select for his wife.

Wife! The thought rushed through her like a sword. His wife! The idea of another woman occupying that position to which she could never aspire cut Dalilah to the quick.

She clenched her hands, sprang to her feet, and paced furiously up and down the room.

His wife! No, that should never be, while she could prevent it. One comfort was, that with all her devotion, this Miss Brailsford was yet a stranger to Gilbert. He had seen her, of course, on that occasion at the Madeleine church at Paris, to which he had referred the first time he came to the Little House in Piccadilly; but even up to the night of his disappearance he had firmly believed that it was Dalilah whom he had encountered.

The resemblance must be wonderful indeed, and Dalilah would take care to profit by it. Gilbert should never know any one but herself. He should owe his rescue to her, and to her alone.

Her cheek flushed with triumph at the thought; but the next moment a cloud came over her brow.

What would be the end of it all? she thought. She could never be his wife—she would never be worthy to fill that honourable place, to bear that holy name. He might love her, but he could never marry her; and as she thought of this, the haughty beauty buried her face in her hands, and burst into a flood of tears.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IKEY LEVY ON THE WATCH.

MR. MORTON, Prince Polonia's secretary, sat in his office on the night after the conversation which he and his august master had had with Ikey Levy the Jew in reference to the removal of Sir Gilbert Montacute.

The night was warm, and the secretary, who had been working very hard, had retired from his desk to the window, by which he was lying on a sofa smoking a cigar, and occasionally sipping some iced drink which stood by his side.

Though a man of business, Mr. Morton was also a man of pleasure. Like most sly men, he was also of an extremely sensual nature, and never allowed anything to stand in his way when the indulgence of his passions was concerned.

He had been in the Park on the preceding evening, and had seen Dalilah.

Not for the first time. Often before he had noticed her, both on horseback and driving in her pony-carriage; but never previously had he been so much struck by her.

Before, he had thought her a pretty woman—not prettier than other women of his acquaintance. On this last occasion, owing to her carriage having been blocked in the drive, he had had an opportunity of

gazing at her for a very long time, and had come away wildly in love with her.

He knew that it was a dangerous passion for him to indulge in, for he was acquainted with the Prince's relations with the fair siren, and he was perfectly aware that to cross his master's path was as much as his place was worth.

Nevertheless he by no means despaired of being able to accomplish the end which he had in view.

Stratagem, not force, was always Mr. Morton's favourite weapon, and he thought he saw a way of inducing the citadel to surrender by private capitulation and not by attack.

'She certainly is a very beautiful woman,' soliloquised the secretary, puffing his smoke into the air, and as well as he could in the dusk watching it form itself into fantastic wreaths around him,—'she certainly is a very beautiful woman, and one who is a credit to her lovers for the time being. That is what these fools are sent into the world for'—as he spoke he snapped his fingers contemptuously in the direction of the Prince's cabinet—'to play the braggart and to pay for doing so; while wiser men, who choose to go quietly to work, reap the advantages of the fool's folly and the rich man's wealth.

'This peerless beauty has grown sick of our friend here, spurns him and his presents, and languishes for Sir Gilbert Montacute. Gilbert Montacute not being forthcoming, and our friend here being dismissed, Albert Schwarzberg is installed as first favourite. He is young, handsome, and very rich; and though the girl's heart, or what she calls her heart, is given to Montacute, this man serves as an excellent fill-gap.

DALILAH.

‘The chance hardly looks healthy for any one who would step in and turn that trio into a quartette; but I think I see my way to doing it. It would be very glorious not merely to make Dalilah accept me for her lover, but at the same time to put a spoke into the wheel of my friend here’—and again he shook his fist towards the cabinet—‘for whom I have so very excellent a hatred.’

As he finished his sentence, midnight rang out from a neighbouring church, and Morton rolled lazily to his feet, proceeded down the gravel path, and opening a little door in the wall, found the Jew standing close against it outside. He let him in without saying a word, and they passed through the garden and into the secretary’s room together.

‘You are punctual, Mr. Levy,’ said Morton. ‘Now you have come, I will just pull down the blind and light the gas. I was indulging in a quiet siesta, after an immense amount of hard work, which I have been getting through this evening. There, that is better,’ he cried. ‘Now we look more comfortable. You won’t have any of this cool drink, I suppose; you prefer some of that brandy which you tasted last time. Why, good heavens, man!’ said Morton, turning suddenly upon the Jew, ‘what’s the matter with you? You are as pale as death. Are you ill?’

‘No, not ill—that’s to say, I’m not very ill, my dear,’ said Ikey Levy. ‘I have had a good deal of trouble since I saw you, and I’ve got more to come, I fear.’

‘Look here, Levy,’ said Morton in a quiet but determined voice; ‘just before you left last time, you let out that you had recognised my employer here. You

're not up to any of your tricks—playing double, or anything of that kind, are you ?'

'So help me heaven, nothing of the sort !' said the Jew.

'So much the better for you,' said Morton. 'We can do pretty well what we like here, and would crush you like a worm. On the other hand, if you treat us well, you will be very well paid for it. But I confess I didn't like your looks.'

'I was upset, my dear ; I'm quite out of sorts, and that's the fact. I shall be better after a drop of that brandy, if you will just get it out. Ah !' said he, smacking his lips after swallowing a glassful of the liquor, which Morton poured out for him ; 'there, I'm better already.'

'What's been the matter with you ?' said Morton sarcastically. 'Have you lost eighteen-pence, or neglected an opportunity of swindling anybody, or been weak enough to forgive an enemy, or what ?'

'No, none of 'em, none of 'em ; and certainly not the last one,' cried the Jew ; 'I never forgive, and I never forget. People say I have no principles, but I say I have ; and that's one of them. Give me some more brandy, if you please.'

'That seems to be one of your principles too, Mr. Ikey,' said Morton, 'to take as much brandy as you can get when it is good, and you have to pay nothing for it. Well, have you thought over that matter we discussed ?'

'I have,' said the Jew, 'thought it over carefully.'

'And do you think it can be managed ?'

'I think it can. It will require to be very largely ~~paid~~,' said the Jew, his eyes gleaming with avarice,

‘for it is a very dangerous job; and it will have to be very neatly done, to say nothing of the difficulty of finding the crib to stow the gentleman away in.’

‘You need not be afraid about the money,’ said Morton; ‘you have only to name the amount, and you shall receive half of it down, and the other half so soon as our friend is safely in the custody into which you may choose to confide him. Now, when can it be done —to-morrow?’

‘No; not to-morrow,’ said the Jew hurriedly; ‘not for two or three days yet.’

‘And why not?’ asked Morton.

‘Because one of my best hands is out of sorts,’ said the Jew.

‘Ill?’ said Morton.

‘Well, not exactly ill, not exactly—Well, I can’t tell you what’s the matter with him; and it’s about him that I am so upset just now; and till all comes round I shouldn’t like to take the job in hand; for he is wonderfully useful, and always has his wits about him.’

‘Well, am I to tell my principal that you undertake the job?’ asked Morton.

‘You may,’ said the Jew.

‘And that you will carry it out as quickly as possible?’

‘I will; and within a week from this time you may reckon it done.’

‘And you have found a perfectly safe place of reception for our friend?’

‘If anybody finds him where I shall put him, my dear, I will give your friend the Greek merchant, who has the coronet on his chairs—ha, ha! what a good

joke that was !—I will return to your friend the Greek merchant the money he pays me for this little transaction.'

The brandy which he had taken had evidently done the old man good, for he chuckled heartily over this last speech ; then he rose and took his leave. Mr. Morton turned out the gas, and walked with him to the little door in the wall. A hansom cab passing at the moment, the secretary jumped in, and was borne away to his chambers. A few minutes afterwards he was stretched upon his bed, and dreaming of Dalilah.

The Jew hurried through the streets at his usual slinking shambling pace, avoiding the large thoroughfares, and choosing the smaller streets, and therein keeping as close as he could to the walls of the houses, under whose shadow he seemed to glide stealthily along.

The exhilarating effects of the brandy which he had swallowed very soon passed off ; his old careworn look crept over his face, he glanced anxiously over his shoulder from time to time ; and at length not merely from fatigue, but from absolute nervousness, he felt compelled to hail a four-wheeled cab, and in it to be driven to within a quarter of a mile of his own home.

When the Jew reached his door, morning was already beginning to break. He fumbled nervously in his pocket, took therefrom his key, and let himself in quietly ; he passed straight through into the back kitchen, and sat down for a few minutes to collect his thoughts.

Then he rose, unlocked a cupboard, and taking from it a long bottle, put it to his lips.

'I never thought I should have to come to this,' he

said, as he replaced the bottle and locked the cupboard; 'I never thought Ikey Levy would have to supply himself with a stock of Dutch courage. But I am an old man now, a very old man, and my nerves are not what they used to be; besides, I am regular upset about Tom—I have my worst fears about Tom. Now let's go upstairs, and see what Neddy's got to say about him.'

He passed out of the door, and slowly ascended the rickety staircase, assisting himself by the wooden hand-rail. The steps were very steep, and the old man every now and then paused for breath.

The house was but one story high, and the attic was a long narrow room with a sloping roof, only lit from a patched skylight. In the corner of this room, on an old flock mattress, and covered over by two or three sacks and a large piece of matting, lay a boy.

His face and hands were black with dirt; so much of his linen as could be seen was foul and ragged.

He was asleep, but not sleeping peacefully. He moaned, and started, and whined, now muttering unintelligible words, now starting restlessly, tossing from side to side, and throwing his arms above his head.

The Jew crept forward and looked at him.

Then he bent down by the boy's side, and took him gently by the arm and shook him.

The boy, still in his sleep, twitched his arm away and grumbled defiantly.

'Thinks it's the traps,' said the old man, smiling to himself: 'poor little Neddy thinks the traps have got hold of him.—Here, Neddy,' shaking him again, 'it's all right, my boy; it isn't the traps, it's only me. Wake up, Neddy; I want to speak to you.'

After a little more shaking the boy opened his eyes, gradually raised himself, yawned, stretched, and sat up-right in bed.

‘What’s the matter?’ he cried. ‘O, it’s you, Ikey, is it? I couldn’t make out what it was. What do you want?’

‘Did you go after Tom this morning, as I told you, Neddy?’

‘I should think I did!’

‘Did he go out again to-day?’

‘I should think he did! Regular flare-up lark he had to-day.’

‘What did he do? What did he say?’

‘I waited by his place until quite late in the morning,’ said the boy, ‘and I thought he was never coming, when I see him come out dressed quite different to what he had been before—not swell, I mean, but kiddy-looking. I follered him down to Clare-market; and there he goes into a public, and presently he comes out with two little dorgs, one tucked under each arm. “This is a rum go,” I sez to myself; “I wonder what he’s going to do with them.” I follers him straight on till he gits up outside the omblibus; and I gits on too, and sits on the knifeboard with my back again his’n, blowed if I didn’t. I was a-laughing fit to kill myself, but I never let on. He got down when the ’bus stopped at the Richmond-bridge; and I got down too and follered him again, till I see him making for a house lying in the fields down Twickenham way.’

‘The devil!’ cried the Jew; ‘what sort of a house? Not a old-fashioned one with a turret on the roof, and a bell in it?’

‘You couldn’t have hit it better, if you had got the

photograp before you,' said the boy; 'that's the werry shop.'

'What did he do there?' cried the Jew. 'Tell me instantly, instantly!'

'I am a-tellin' you as quick as I can,' said the boy, 'and it's no good your kiddin' me on, for I can't go no faster. What did he do? Why, he went straight up the road, and when he got to the gate, there comd out a young woman to him—a swell young woman, I mean, in a riding 'abit; I saw her horse cooling in the yard.'

'And did Tom speak to this young woman?'

'Speak to her! I should think he did! They was a-patterin' together for about half an hour.'

'What did they say?—did you hear what they said?'

'Yes, I managed to hear. There was a deep sunk ditch that run underneath the garden, and was half covered over with waving grass. I dropped down into that, and creeping along it, managed to get up pretty close by them and to hear what they talked about.'

'And what was it?' asked the Jew.

'Well, it was Tom as pattered principally, and the young lady as listened. Tom told the young lady that he had had more trouble in finding out what she wanted than he thought at first he would have had; but that he had found it at last, and that her swell friend was hidden away in a lonely house on some island in the river.'

'Ah!' cried the Jew; 'go on, go on!'

'I am a-goin' on,' said the boy, 'though I don't see how you can care about such a gaff as all this; it don't concern you, nor me, nor any of us. Tom said he had found out the place—this old house on the

island—and he togged himself out as a navvy, and made believe he had got work to do there—that must be when I see him put that pick and basket of tools into the cloak-room at the railway-station,’ said the boy.

‘Quite right; that was it, Neddy. Sharp boy, sharp boy!’ said the Jew. ‘Go on, go on!’

‘Well, he found the swell was there, and he sent him a note, and then he climbed up a tree and had a talk with him. Fancy old Tom climbing up a tree; that must have been a lark!’

‘It’s a lark that will cost him dear,’ said the Jew, grinding his teeth and shaking his fist. ‘Well, what more?’

‘Tom told the lady he had told the swell that he came from a lady, and that the lady was watching over him and would soon get him out.’

‘The devil he did!’ said the Jew.

‘Ah, that he did,’ said the boy; ‘and Tom promised the lady that he’d look after it and come and see her again very soon; and then he made his lucky, and so did I.’

‘You are a good boy, Neddy,’ said the Jew; ‘and there is a half-crown for you.—Ah, my dear friend Sledgehammer Tom, you will have to pay for this, you will have to pay for this!’

The Jew left the boy, and proceeded downstairs to his favourite den.

He lay down on an old pallet which stood in the corner, and closed his eyes for a few minutes; but his mind was too busily at work to enable him to compose himself to sleep. The thought of what he had just heard from the boy was stirring in his busy brain.

It was evident that his reflections were of no agreeable character by the manner in which from time to time he started, and sitting upright on the pallet bit his long fingers ravenously, and shook his fist in the empty air, as though threatening some figure before him.

By degrees he became calmer, and gradually falling back dropped into a heavy slumber, though he still remained in a sitting posture on the bed.

He was wakened by the sound of a heavy kick on the outer door and of a whistle low but prolonged.

The Jew started up, shook himself together as best he might, and shuffled to the door.

He opened it, and admitted Devil Dick.

‘Why don’t you keep me a little longer while you are about it?’ was this worthy’s agreeable salutation; ‘why don’t you make me wait another half-hour outside the door, in order that the bobby may come round on his beat, and ask me what’s that sticking out underneath my coat?’

‘I am very sorry, Dick,’ said the Jew, ‘but I fell asleep, my dear.’

‘Asleep! I don’t believe a word of it. You don’t give yourself any time for sleep, you don’t; you would think it was time wasted, you would. I know what you was about,—hiding away some of the swag that’s been brought here by poor devils like me, and bought by you for next to nothing.’

‘No, no, Dick, I swear I was asleep; have had a heavy tramp; come from the West-end of the town; been there about that business I told you of.’

‘Well, when is it to come off? What’s to be my figure for helping in it? It ought to be something stiff; if this cove shows fight, it’ll be a nasty job.’

‘I’ll tell you all about it in a minute, my dear,’ said the Jew. ‘But first, what have you brought me, Dick? what did you say about something sticking out of your coat?’

‘I ain’t brought nothing,’ said Dick surlily. ‘Do you think I am never to have a holiday? I worked hard enough last week, as you ought to know.’

‘You were a good boy, Dick, certainly, last week; you brought over plenty of stuff.’

‘Exactly,’ said the ruffian; ‘and yesterday I took a holiday. I was pretty tight the night before, and so I kept in downy all day yesterday, and snoozed it off.’

‘Ah! liquor’s the ruin of you young men,’ said the Jew, with a sigh.

‘Let’s be ruined a little more just now, then,’ said Dick. ‘Come, it’s no good saying you haven’t any; I know your cellar.’

‘I wouldn’t say so for the world, my dear. I have always got a drop of the right sort for a friend, and you are a friend, ain’t you, Dick?’

‘I suppose so,’ said Dick carelessly. ‘Now then, what about this plant?’

‘First take a drop of this rum, my dear,’ said the Jew. ‘Now listen: you know the crib where I proposed that you should take this swell to?’

‘Certainly,’ said Dick; ‘over at—’

‘Hush!’ said the Jew, interrupting him, ‘don’t mention names, my dear; it is always best not. Well, we can’t take him there.’

‘Why not?’ growled Dick.

‘Because a friend of ours has split.’

‘Who?’

‘To the swell friend’s real friends, I mean; not those who employ us.’

‘Who is it that has split?’ cried Dick, bending eagerly forward.

‘Sledgehammer Tom,’ said the Jew, looking to see what effect his words would have on his companion.

‘Damnation!’ roared Dick, springing to his feet.

‘Stop a minute, my dear,’ said the Jew, laying his hand upon him; ‘listen to what he has done. First, unknown to us, he has been in communication with this swell—has written to him, seen him, dressed in disguise; dressed in another disguise to see his young woman, and told her where he was and what was likely to become of him. He has done all this, Dick. What do you think of that?’

‘Think!’ roared Dick; ‘I would soon show him what I think!’ and he struggled to free himself from the old man’s grasp.

‘No, Dick, no, not now; we must get through this business first. And recollect, nothing dangerous now; we are scarcely free of that horrible night with the cellar, and the body, and that plunge overboard which is still ringing in my ears. You shall deal with Sledgehammer Tom by and by; but we must find a new pal to help you in the removal of this swell.’

At that moment the whistle, low and prolonged, sounded through the room.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE STRUGGLE FOR PRECEDENCE.

THE hot days were at their hottest, when, just as the tall poplar-trees which bordered the river below Teddington-lock were beginning to throw their shadows over the stream, a light wherry shot out from under the bank on which stands Pope's Villa, and made for the little eyot in the centre of the river.

It was pulled by a vigorous young waterman, and in the stern sat an elegantly dressed woman.

She wore a becoming hat and a figured-muslin jacket and skirt ; and notwithstanding the heat of the weather, she was closely veiled.

In obedience to her command the boatman rested on his oars, merely using them occasionally to prevent the wherry drifting away with the falling tide.

After the lapse of a few moments, a man in a canoe, who had been paddling up and down within a little distance, drew towards the wherry.

He was dressed in flannel trousers and a tight-fitting jersey, and a fold of white linen fell round the back of his head, pendent from his straw hat, to protect him from the rays of the yet scorching sun.

A few rapid strokes of his paddles brought him alongside the wherry. Then he paused, and touching his hat, said,

‘I thought it was you, miss; I am glad you have come to keep the appointment.’

‘My interest in the affair in which you are engaged is so great,’ said the lady, ‘that you may always depend upon my being not only present but punctual at any place of meeting that you think best for us. Now what news have you to give me?’

‘I have no particular news, miss; but I have something to say—something which must be said at once and will not bear keeping. If you have no objection, I will change places with your waterman, and he can keep himself in exercise in my canoe while I talk to you.’

The lady nodded, and rapidly gave the required instructions to her attendant.

He apparently was not in the least astonished; he had seen too much of this sort of thing not to take it as a mere matter of course; and he quickly gave up his seat and shifted his position into the canoe, with the understanding that he should return in half an hour.

A moment after, the canoe looked like a small speck upon the river, as it glided away in the distance beneath the strong practised strokes of its professional occupant.

‘I don’t think I can bear the heat of this veil any longer,’ said the lady.

‘You can remove it with perfect safety,’ said her companion; ‘it is rapidly becoming dusk, and we’re too much out of the regular track of the passing boats to run any danger of recognition.’

Thus assured, the lady took off her veil, and revealed the features of Constance Brailsford.

‘I asked you to come here and meet me to-night,

miss,' said her companion, who was no other than Sledgehammer Tom, 'because I think it is time we did something decisive as to the rescuing of the gentleman who is in close keeping higher up,' and he nodded his head towards the lock.

'Does any fresh danger threaten him?' cried Constance eagerly.

'No fresh danger that I know of, miss,' said Tom; 'but there has been a good deal of confabulation lately among parties that I know of, and that, I think, bodes no good to him; and even if there wasn't that up, there is something else which makes me sure that it is right to make our bold stroke as soon as possible.'

'And that is—' and Constance paused.

'Well, that is rather more as concerning myself. I have some idea that my pals have begun to be suspicious of me, and cannot exactly make out my goings on. They're a desperate lot, and wouldn't stand upon any sort of repairs as to what they wouldn't do, if they were put to it; so if I am to be of any service to you, I think we had better get on with it at once, before they are more wide awake.'

'You are only expressing my feeling,' said Constance. 'For some time past I have been keenly alive to the horror of leaving this unfortunate gentleman to undergo the misery which he must necessarily suffer, when it only needs courage and determination on our part to rescue him from it.'

'It'll take more than courage and determination, miss,' said Tom quietly; 'it will take a deal of planning first, and then the courage and determination will be well enough.'

'What do you propose to do?' asked Constance.

‘I propose to go up to the island again under that old navy game—or, if that don’t do now, under some other disguise which may prove suitable—and take means to let the gentleman know that on a certain night, to be fixed, an attempt to rescue him will be made. He must be all fly and downy to the time and everything else, and must help us as much as he possibly can.’

‘And when do you propose to make this attempt?’

‘When? Well, let’s see. To-night’s Thursday. I should say to-morrow week.’

‘You don’t propose to go alone?’

‘O no, miss; that would never do. There are two or three mates of mine who knew me before—well, before I fell into the wretched state in which you have seen me—men who don’t even know how low I have fallen, and who think I have only knocked off regular work on account of a liking for drink and low company, but who are trusty and stanch, and will see me through any difficulty or danger where pluck or courage are to be of use.’

‘You will have to take another person with you,’ said Constance.

‘It is not an affair in which a stranger can well have a share,’ said Tom; ‘and you will excuse my saying, miss, that it must be some one well known to you, and whose squareness and gameness you can guarantee.’

‘The “squareness,” by which I suppose you mean their being honest and loyal, I can answer for,’ said Constance, smiling; ‘but as for the “gameness,” by which I imagine courage is meant, I can say nothing about it.’

‘Well, at all events he must—’

‘I am not alluding to a man, but to a woman.’

‘A woman!’

‘Myself.’

‘You, miss! You come on an expedition of this kind!’

‘I must; I feel I could not possibly be absent. I have long determined in my mind, that when the time for freeing this unfortunate gentleman had arrived, I would be there, and be the first to welcome him when he had attained a place of safety.’

‘That’s all very well, miss; but you’ll be confoundedly in the way,’ said outspoken Tom.

‘Not so much as you fancy, perhaps,’ said Constance. ‘I am a soldier’s daughter, and have seen a good deal of hard rough work in one way or another; besides, I have many ideas upon the subject, and I think that very likely, when it comes to the pinch, you may find my woman’s wit by no means a contemptible assistance to your man’s strength and courage.’

‘You are a rare plucky un,’ answered Tom; ‘I must say that for you. I knew that the first time I saw you, when you came out holding the lamp in the gallery of the old house down there, and I was scared, taking you for my Lucy’s ghost. I thought so the second time, when you came so bold by yourself to the railings at the riverside there; there’s few girls in London, brought up as you have been, would have ventured on that. And so you want to come on this chance, do you? Well, if your heart’s set upon it, I suppose you must.’

‘My heart is set upon it, and I shall,’ said Constance cheerfully. ‘We have talked enough now; you must take another opportunity, say on Tuesday or

Wednesday next, of giving me the exact particulars of your plan ; meantime be earnest and vigilant. There is the waterman approaching in your canoe, and here is some money for your expenses. No ; take it, I beg ; it has been honestly earned.'

The tears sprang into Sledgehammer Tom's eyes as he heard the last words.

'Bless you for saying that,' he said : 'if I can only keep in the mind I am now in, I will never touch another penny that has been got in a manner I should be ashamed of. You will hear from me, miss ; and on Tuesday or Wednesday you will see me to settle all.'

He slid dextrously into the canoe, which the waterman had abandoned, and was soon lost in the distance.

That same night the Italian Opera house was crammed.

The English aristocracy care little for the country during the loveliest period of summer ; they only visit it when the excitement of sporting and the chase can tempt their jaded appetites during the autumn and winter.

The gas-heated atmosphere of the theatre is more enjoyable to them than the delicious coolness and the breeze which steals along the stream, or the thousand fresh and innocent scents which come wafted on it from the meadows and the gardens.

It is a grand night. Royalty is there in its state box. All the beauty and the aristocracy of London are gathered together, listening with ravished ears to the delicious singing of Patti in the *Sonnambula*.

Only on one face are evident signs of displeasure noticeable.

It is a lovely face combined with a lovely figure, whose owner, magnificently dressed, sits in her box on the grand tier, lolling negligently backwards, and occasionally pulling to pieces the flowers in the splendid bouquet which lies before her, or rapidly unfolding and reclosing her fan.

It is Dalilah.

She rarely cares to conceal by her looks the expression of the feelings by which she is influenced; certainly she does not do so in the present instance.

She looks, and is, unutterably bored and wearied. She had expected Albert Schwarzberg to be in attendance upon her, and up to that moment he had not put in an appearance.

There are innumerable cavaliers in the stalls below who would have given anything to be allowed to ascend to that box and offer consolation to its fair occupant. But all and each of them knew that such a proceeding on their part would be deemed an impertinence, and most keenly resented.

So Dalilah sat alone.

Often and often had she smiled to herself in triumph as her box was crowded with the best men of the day, coming up in relays, and anxious to pay homage to her, while the prettiest leaders of fashion, who glanced scornfully at her when they met in the crush-room at the close of the performance, were deserted by their husbands, brothers, and friends.

Now she could feel something of the spite which must have filled them.

It was excessively provoking; she would make Albert Schwarzberg pay for this; she would receive him in the coolest manner when he came, and—

The boxkeeper's key in the door—he was there.

The door opened, and the boxkeeper, ushering a gentleman into the box, closed the door after him.

It was not Albert Schwarzberg. It was a perfect stranger—a gentleman whom she had never even seen before—a foreigner evidently; a man of small stature, with black hair closely cropped, thick black beard and moustache.

His evening dress fitted him to perfection, his natty little boots with shiny tips were of foreign make, his lavender-coloured kid gloves clung to his hands like their skin.

Dalilah looked at him as he bowed, and raised her eyebrows.

‘There must be some mistake, I think,’ said she in her insolent imperious way; ‘this is my box; and I have not the honour of your acquaintance.’

‘No mistake at all, madam,’ said the stranger, in a voice which she appeared to recognise. ‘I am highly flattered at the unmistakable compliment which you have paid me in taking me for some one else. If any gentleman had asked me for my card to-night, I should have handed him this;’ and from a remarkably neat case he took out a card, which he laid before her. It bore the words—‘Count Caraccas, Spanish Embassy.’

Dalilah looked at it, and then said,

‘I am not inclined for fooling, sir. You may be Count Caraccas, but he is nothing to me.’

‘I said, if a gentleman asked me for my card, I should present that to him,’ said the imperturbable stranger. ‘I should be an attaché of the Spanish Legation to him; but to you I should be—’ and here he

bent his head and whispered in her ear—‘Edward Bloxam of Scotland-yard.’

Dalilah looked at him attentively, then burst into a loud fit of laughter.

‘I must say, Mr. Bloxam, that you are the greatest genius of the day. What on earth has prompted you to assume this appearance?’

‘Business, ma’am, nothing but business. Perhaps you won’t object to my taking this seat in front; it might look strange if I were seen standing at the back.’

‘By all means sit down; there’s no box in the house to which you would not be a credit. And what business has brought you here?’

‘There is an eminent solicitor, ma’am, of many years’ standing in the City, and whose wealth is supposed to be enormous. He is trustee of very large sums of money, and from information we have received we believe that he has been helping himself to that trust-money in a very unlimited manner. We have not brought it home to him yet, but we shall within a day or two. Meantime he is constantly watched. The crossing-sweeper beside his door is a detective, the commissionnaire who calls his brougham at his office is a detective, his valet is a detective. We never lose sight of him. One of our men jumped up behind the spikes of his carriage in Portland-place and watched him down here; I was waiting for him, lounging carelessly under the portico, as he drove up. I have never taken my eyes off him since he entered his box. I shall follow him to the crush-room; and when his name is roared out by the linkman, the man who rode here with him will ride back with him, and remain in front of his house all night.’

‘That is really very clever,’ said Dalilah. ‘And what has procured me the honour of this visit? You are not employed by anybody to watch me, I hope?’

‘O no, ma’am, quite the contrary; but seeing you here, I thought I would avail myself of the opportunity of coming up to speak to you about that matter on which I am engaged for you. The last time I saw you, you told me you had determined that the rescue of Sir Gilbert Montacute was not to be undertaken by the police in the regular course of business, but that I and certain of my comrades were to do it as a private job on your account. Are you still of that mind?’

‘Most certainly,’ said Dalilah; ‘I have special reasons for my determination. Anybody could be rescued by the police, who are paid to undertake it as part of their duty. Sir Gilbert must owe his deliverance to me.’

‘Well, ma’am, it is not strictly correct. I must say, that I don’t know what the chief commissioner would say if he knew about it, for he’s a regular martinet is Sir Gerald Griffin; but if you say so, I suppose it must be done.’

‘And if done, it were well it were done quickly. But I suppose you don’t read Shakespeare, Mr. Bloxam?’ said Dalilah, smiling.

‘I do not, ma’am; but I agree with the gentleman’s sentiments, the quicker the better; and therefore, you being agreeable, I propose that, say, to-morrow week, which will be on Friday.’

‘You have laid your plans?’ asked Dalilah.

‘Just sketched them out, ma’am, though not filled-in yet; but they look promising. It will be a tight squeeze, and there may be some rough-and-tumble

work; but we shall pull the gentleman out, and very likely nail some of those who helped to kidnap him.'

'Ah!' cried Dalilah.

'Some of the little ones, I mean, ma'am,' said Bloxam, smiling significantly. 'Somehow or other, in hauls like these, the big fish always manage to break through the net.'

'Again I have to acknowledge that you are a clever man, Mr. Bloxam,' said Dalilah. 'When did you say—on Friday week?'

'If that suits you, ma'am,' said Bloxam.

'It's lucky you made that stipulation, for I am more concerned in the date than you fancy; you will have to take me with you.'

'Take you with us when we break in? You are joking,' said Bloxam. 'It is impossible!'

'I have twice said that you are a clever man, Mr. Bloxam,' said Dalilah, 'and you ought to know that to a clever man nothing is impossible. Now I am determined to go. I have long promised myself the pleasure of being the first to congratulate Sir Gilbert Montacute on his escape, to let him know that he owes it to me, and to hear his expressions of gratitude. I would not forego that last for any amount of money that could be offered to me.'

'It is uncommonly irregular, ma'am,' said Bloxam doubtfully; 'but if you *are* determined—'

'I am; nothing shall shake my determination.'

'Then we must take you with us, I suppose. Beg your pardon, ma'am, my friend the solicitor and his family have had enough of the *Sonnambula*, and are off. I will give you a call on Sunday or Monday, and arrange the details.'

And Count Caraccas, making a magnificent bow, glided from the lady's presence.

Prince Polonia was not at the opera that night. He had intended to go, but had been informed by Mr. Morton, his secretary, that his presence would be required at home, as Ikey Levy had settled to come that night with the necessary information about the removal of Sir Gilbert Montacute.

Mr. Levy's demeanour on this occasion was very different from that adopted by him when he was first presented to the Prince. He commenced by wishing 'his Highness' good-evening; then, when the Prince started at the term, and Morton looked savagely at the old man, he merely bowed and said :

'In matters of business it is always best to be frank, your Highness. I know that your Highness is your Highness, and not a Greek merchant, as you were originally represented to be; and knowing it, it would be unfair in me, and calculated to mislead, if I were not to call you by your title.'

'As you please, sir,' said the Prince shortly.

'Exactly,' said Ikey; 'I knew you'd see it in that light. You know, as I say, in these matters frankness is everything. I might have been presented to you under any other name; but I told Mr. Morton here: No, I says; I am Ikey Levy; it is under that name I have done the best of my business, and it is under that name I will undertake this job, if job it's to be.'

'You had better get to the point, Levy,' said Morton; 'his Highness has no time to spare.'

'To be sure, to be sure,' said the old man; 'the

point is easily got at. I am game to do the trick, that's about all you want to know.'

'When is it to come off?'

'Well, to-morrow week, Friday; that'll be a very good time for it, I think. Some people say Friday's an unlucky day; that's all gammon. Friday's my lucky day; they never hang on a Friday; so Friday let it be.'

'You have made all the necessary arrangements?'

'All.'

'And where are you going to take him to?'

'Ha, ha, my dear, that's tellings; I don't think I will mention that until we've got him safe there, then you can come and look at him, if you like. There shall be a grating that you can peep through, as if he was a bear or some wild beast; but I won't tell you where it is till he is safely caged.'

'It is no matter to me where the man may be placed,' said the Prince, 'provided that the locality is secluded, and not likely to be found.'

'They'll have sharp noses who would scent-out where we shall place him,' said the Jew.

'I don't imagine that I shall call upon you to retain him in your custody for long,' said the Prince. 'The affair in which he opposed me has scarcely so much interest to me as it had, and it really wouldn't matter if he were free again now. But it must be understood, that when I give the order for him to be let go, his release must be as sudden as was his capture, and he must be sent forth without having the least idea where or by whom he has been kept in captivity.'

The Jew nodded his head. 'I understand,' he said, 'and will take care that all you wish shall be carried out.'

‘ You spoke about some difficulty to get aid for this enterprise next week,’ said Morton. ‘ I gathered from what you said that you mistrusted one of your own people ; what have you done about that ?’

‘ Put some one else on in his place, my dear,’ said the Jew. ‘ I have been so busy, that I have not been able to look after that lad yet ; but his time will come, depend upon it. Once let me work through this job for you, and I will put some one **on** him who will attend to him carefully.’

‘ I didn’t want you to enter into any details, Mr. Levy. I confess I am not sufficiently interested in you and your friends to care how you stand in your private relations with each other ; my only object was to be sure that our work would be properly done.’

‘ You may make yourself perfectly certain of that,’ said the old man. ‘ You engaged me, and I am responsible for it ; and at the same time I think I may take the liberty of saying that how it is done is not any matter to yourself, so long as it is done, and done well.’

Morton looked savage, but the Prince laughed outright ; he was always pleased at the discomfiture of his secretary.

‘ You gave him as good as he brought, Mr. Levy,’ said he ; ‘ and moreover I think you had right on your side. We will leave all entirely to you, merely understanding that the removal is to take place next Friday evening.’

The Jew bowed, and burst into what was for him a most unusual fit of laughter.

Morton and the Prince both looked astonished, and the former said to him,

‘What tickles your fancy in this way, Levy?’

‘Well, my dear, I have a little bit of a joke; and if it only comes off as I hope it will, it will be one of the best bits of fun ever heard. You were asking me just now about one of my boys that I had some suspicion of; I cannot tell you about it until it is all over. I can only say that I hope we shall be just one hour before him. Recollect what I say—just one hour before him.’

And the old man laughed again till the tears ran down his cheeks.

Morton and the Prince stared at each other with astonishment, but nothing more was said; and the Jew shortly after took his leave; his last words at the door being,

‘Recollect what I said—just one hour before!’

CHAPTER XXXI.

FRIDAY NIGHT.

SLEDGEHAMMER TOM had done as he promised.

Resuming his old disguise of the navvy, he had revisited the island, choosing for his time the occasion of a regatta a little higher up the river, which he knew Tony would attend. This gave him an opportunity of calling Nelly from the house, and inducing her to let Sir Gilbert know that he would again seek communication with him by means of the friendly tree which overhung the prisoner's window.

The attempt had been successful, and Sir Gilbert had learned that his friends had been active in his behalf, that an attempt at rescuing him was to be made, and that the date of it was actually fixed.

The hope which had been gradually dying out of Sir Gilbert's mind revived again under this charming intelligence; and when Tom communicated to him the details of the plan for his escape, he felt that there was really now some chance of his protracted torture being brought to a conclusion.

Tom arranged with him that he should be at his window at ten o'clock on the Friday night, and he would hear a soft low tap, when he would open it quietly from the inside, and would find a man mounted on a ladder ready to receive him; or if it were not practicable to

raise the ladder with sufficient silence, the man would be in the upper part of the tree in the exact place where he (Tom) then was.

Wouldn't Tom be this man? Sir Gilbert asked.

Tom couldn't say for certain; he might be required in the garden at the bottom of the ladder; but everything should be done for the best.

So Sir Gilbert was fain to content himself with dreaming over these details, and looking forward into the future till the eventful night arrived.

He had been very restless and agitated all the day, pacing to and fro in the room, and perpetually straining his eyes through the window.

Not that he expected to see anything different from the dull sedgy banks, or the slow barges toiling along by the side of the opposite shore. But the knowledge of what was to take place at night had unhinged him. He could not remain quietly seated as was his wont, and even the prattle of Nelly, when she came into the room with his meals, had on this day no interest for him.

Slowly, slowly the hours passed by.

Bright morning, hot noon, dull evening, dark night.

The long twilight had just deepened into dark, when Sir Gilbert thought he heard some slight noise beneath the window.

He listened attentively.

Yes; there certainly was some one stirring.

He held his breath and listened still.

Presently there came a soft low tap at the window.

Tom was there an hour before his time. What matter? An hour the less captivity, an hour more of freedom.

The tap at the window came again, a little louder than before.

Sir Gilbert raised the sash noiselessly, and peered into the darkness.

There, on the top of the ladder, was the shadowy form of a man; he could distinguish nothing more.

This man seemed to make a gesture of silence, and beckoned Sir Gilbert towards him.

Sir Gilbert climbed out of the window, and while he yet held-on by the sill, he felt the man's hand take his foot and plant it firmly on one of the rungs of the ladder.

Then his foot was moved to a lower rung, and then to a lower.

He left his hold of the window-sill and clung to the top of the ladder. With his hands guided in the same way he gradually effected his descent.

When he found himself safe on the ground, he looked round hastily.

'You are looking for Tom, my dear?' said an old man with a large slouched hat and a long gabardine. 'You are looking for Tom, the navvy who came here to arrange this little matter of your escape.'

'I am,' said Sir Gilbert; 'where is he?'

'He could not leave the boat, my dear. Some of those wicked rogues that belong to this house, and that ran away with you, are lurking in the neighbourhood, and might cut off our retreat; so Tom stays in the boat. We're to bring you to him. Come along!'

They hurried him through the garden and to the edge of the river, where a small boat was in waiting. A man was in it lying on his oars, but it was not Tom.

Sir Gilbert mentioned this at once.

‘No more it is, my dear,’ said the old man who had first spoken; ‘he must be in the barge. We’re going to take you off in a barge—it will prevent suspicion.’

A few strokes of the man’s oars brought them alongside a barge. One of the men jumped out and stood on the deck to receive Sir Gilbert, who was very politely handed up.

When they had all embarked, and the little boat in which they had come was made fast to the stern and floating after them, Sir Gilbert again asked for Tom.

‘Well, my dear, I am afraid you won’t see him this journey,’ said the old man; ‘Tom’s a very unpunctual feller, and this time he will be just one hour too late.’

In an instant Sir Gilbert saw by the devilish leer on the old man’s face that he had been betrayed. He turned hastily round, but only to confront a man, who, pressing the cold barrel of a pistol against his forehead, said,

‘One cry, and you are a dead man!’

At the same time a rope was slipped over his head, and his hands were firmly knotted behind him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ONE HOUR TOO LATE !

Just about an hour after the events narrated in the last chapter, a boat, pulled by two stalwart rowers, in the stern of which were seated three men and a lady, came cruising up the river, keeping in-shore until opposite the island, when it tacked and came across.

It was now quite dark.

In obedience to the commands of one of the men in the stern, the rowers pulled noiselessly alongside the bank and shipped their oars.

The man in the stern, who had given the order, then rose, and handing the lady respectfully along the boat, jumped ashore and offered her his arm, by the aid of which she landed.

The other men then immediately followed ; and the rowers, having received instructions to be ready to put off at a moment's notice, remained in the boat.

The first words spoken were by the lady.

‘ We are scarcely a strong party,’ said she to her guide. ‘ I fear, if any conflict were to take place, that we should get the worst of it.’

‘ I thought you would say that, ma’am,’ said Tom, for it was he ; ‘ but, you see, our game is to win by dodging and not by force. What we have got to do is, to draw the gent out of this place like a cork out of a

bottle, without no one being the wiser. If we was to attempt to make a fight for it, as you say, we should probably get thrashed; at all events we should raise a shindy, which would not suit any of our games, and would smash-up all chance of our ever helping the gent again; so, what we must do we must do by cunning, or not at all.'

'So long as our end is attained, and this unfortunate gentleman rescued, we need not care what means are employed,' said the lady; 'though it is scarcely necessary to say, that if it can be done quietly and without force, I shall be best pleased.'

'You may depend upon my keeping you out of trouble, at all risks, miss,' said Tom. 'If it comes to a rough-and-tumble, not a single scratch shall come within yards of you while I'm alive; therefore you take up your position here; at the least outcry make for the boat, and tell the men to pull off. Leave us to settle the fight as best we can; we are no 'count in comparison to you.'

Tom then led Constance to an angle of the wall, and placed her in the deeper shadow. Then he and his two companions stole noiselessly towards the house, and proceeded to reconnoitre.

A careful and protracted search convinced Tom, to his astonishment, that the usual guards, the foreigners, were not at their ordinary posts, and that the ground-floor of the house was unoccupied.

It was indeed so; for, by Prince Polonia's command, Paolo and his comrades had been withdrawn, in order that they might make no opposition, or, indeed, be cognisant of the abduction of Sir Gilbert by the Jew's band,

Finding the coast thus clear, Tom stationed one of his men outside the door leading into the house from the garden, and placed the other at the opposite corner, with orders to give a shrill whistle at the first approach of danger. Then he himself stole quietly over the grass-plot till he arrived at the tree overhanging Sir Gilbert's window, and stealthily commenced its ascent.

While all this was taking place on the side of the house which fronted the broad stream of the river and the little village on the opposite bank, another boat was gradually making its way among the reeds and overhanging bushes lining the back-water on the other side of the house.

It was a large black boat, manned by four rowers, and containing six male sitters, and a lady enveloped from head to foot in a black-silk cloak.

The utmost silence was observed by this company.

The movements of the rowers were guided by a small active man who sat in the stern, and from thence motioned them what they should do.

Under his direction they pulled the boat quietly to the land.

On this side the intervening space between the house and the river was very narrow, and though there were no trees, it was covered by tall thick bushes.

The bow of the boat had scarcely touched the ground, when the active man made his way from the stern and jumped ashore.

At a motion of his hand all the others sat perfectly still.

Bending himself nearly double, he made his tortuous way through the bushes, and creeping snake-like

gradually approached the house. When he arrived within a short distance, he stopped and listened eagerly.

Not a sound was audible.

He approached still nearer, till he reached a window barred outside, and having a thick wooden shutter which reached nearly to the top. By the aid of the outside bars the man dragged himself up till he was enabled to peer through the glass space intervening between the top of the shutter and the window-frame.

There was no light in the room—all was dark and silent; he could distinguish nothing.

He listened again. He heard the sighing of the night-wind in the trees, the faint murmur of life and traffic from the far shore of the river on the other side of the house; but nothing more.

Then he returned to the boat as cautiously as he came.

When he arrived at the bank, he bent down, and in a low voice called, 'Davis.'

One of the dark figures in the stern of the boat raised his hand.

'There is no one stirring, so far as I can see,' said the small active man, who was indeed Bloxam the detective. 'The foreigners, whom we previously noticed, don't seem to be about, and the coast is clear.'

'Plant,' said Davis concisely.

'Maybe,' said Bloxam, 'but I think not. I don't believe they have the smallest notion of our intention of visiting them to-night. However, it may be a plant, as you say, and it is therefore best to be on the safe side. Hand the lady forward, some of you, and then come yourselves.'

In obedience to this command the lady rose, and

was passed from hand to hand till she stood on the shore by Bloxam's side. Then the others gradually followed her, with the exception of the four rowers, who remained in the boat.

When the others were gathered together on the grass, there was a certain similarity of appearance among them, a certain uniformity of stature and bearing which bespoke something of a military organisation. They were indeed picked men from the Metropolitan Police-force, whose services Bloxam had obtained for his adventure.

'Now, men,' said Bloxam to them when they had formed into a little square; 'two of you, Giles and Brown, will remain here by the boat as a reserve; Davis, Thornton, and Dyke will come along with me. You, Thornton, are the oldest and steadiest man present, so into your charge I shall give the lady; whenever I am unable to look to her myself, you will answer for her safety.'

The man addressed touched the brim of the wide-awake hat which he wore in a stiff mechanical manner, but made no reply.

'Who has the bag of pickers and the file?' asked Bloxam.

'They are here, sir, said Dyke, producing a small canvas bag from the folds of his coat.

'Give them to me,' said Bloxam; 'and look out for a surprise. If I have time or a chance to give a whistle, I will do so; but at the least sign of a rush or scuffle you must be prepared. You, Thornton, will hurry the lady to the boat; you, Brown and Dyke, will come to my assistance; and look here, don't hesitate to use your staves, or—' he added in a lower voice—'your barkers, if need be.'

The men touched their hats simultaneously, and Bloxam, leaving, crept again slowly towards the door. Kneeling down in front of it, he opened the canvas bag which he had received from Dyke, and taking from it an instrument he carefully selected, began to operate upon the lock.

The lock was strong and new, but a few dexterous turns of the detective's wrist gave him a grip upon the bolt, and after five minutes' manipulation it shot slowly back.

Then Bloxam carefully and noiselessly turned the handle and pressed against the door. It gave way for a few inches, then stopped with a grating sound. Bloxam instantly dropped flat upon the grass and listened attentively for three or four minutes.

All was quiet as before.

'A chain,' he said to himself; 'they have put up a chain; but that won't keep us out very long.'

He again had recourse to the canvas bag, and this time drew from it a watch-spring file of peculiar temper and sharpness; then from his pocket he took a small nob of soap, with which he anointed the edge of the file and one of the links of the chain which was exposed and on which he had determined to operate; then he commenced his work.

In three minutes he had completed his task, the links of the chain fell asunder, and the door yielded.

Bloxam's habitual caution did not desert him now. Creeping on all fours just within the passage, he stopped and listened; then gradually rising, he made his way softly along the passage.

The lady in the black-silk cloak had meantime exhibited great impatience, and it was all that Thornton

could do to restrain her. When, so far as she could see through the darkness, she made out that Bloxam had entered the house, her anxiety reached to such a pitch that she determined to follow him. But Thornton dissuaded her, and she stood biting her lips and tapping her feet upon the turf.

After the lapse of a few minutes, but which seemed to her, in her feverish and impatient state, at least as many hours, Bloxam was seen to issue through the doorway and make his way quickly towards them.

When close, they saw by the expression of his face that he was puzzled and amazed.

‘I have been through all the lower rooms of the house,’ said he in a hurried whisper, ‘and there is not a soul to be seen; the room which, on my last visit for spying purposes, I had seen occupied by the keeper of the house and his daughter is deserted; the corridor where the three foreigners were in the habit of keeping guard is deserted; there is not a soul to be seen anywhere. What is the meaning of this?’

‘Plant,’ said Davis again.

‘May be so,’ said Bloxam; ‘but still, I think not.’

‘Have you been into the upper rooms?’ asked Dalilah.

‘No, madam, I did not go so far as that,’ said Bloxam.

‘But you told me that the room where the gentleman was imprisoned is on the upper story.’

‘It is,’ said Bloxam; ‘a large room facing the other way. I thought it best, however, to assure myself that there was no ambush in the lower portion before ascending the stairs.’

‘But you will do so now?’ said Dalilah impatiently.

‘At once,’ said Bloxam; ‘and listen, ma’am. If the way is perfectly clear, when I have assured myself that there is no plant such as Davis suspects, I will give a signal, and the lady can come up, closely attended by you, Thornton. There is no need, madam,’ said he in a lower voice, ‘to let more of them into the details than is absolutely necessary.’

Dalilah nodded; she did not care to speak; she was all impatience to share in the adventure.

Then Bloxam quitted them again, and they saw him disappear through the doorway.

This time he made his way to the foot of the staircase, then he ascended it step by step, pausing and listening constantly.

Gradually he worked his way to the first landing, where there was a recess.

He stopped short here, for he thought he saw something move. He peered into the darkness, and presently found it was but the curtain, which was being blown about by the draught which came through the open window.

Then he proceeded to climb a second flight.

At the top of the stairs he found three doors. Two were open, but that one immediately fronting him, and which he imagined to be the door of the chamber occupied by Sir Gilbert, was closed.

Davis’s warning again occurred to him.

There might be an ambush in either of the side rooms, from which he could be pounced upon as he passed to Sir Gilbert’s deliverance.

This portion of his task was therefore executed by him with extra caution. The doors of the rooms being swung far back, he could manage to peer into them

through the cracks between the hinges, and thus he satisfied himself that they were empty.

Arrived at the door of the room which he desired to penetrate, he knelt down before it and listened attentively. Then he noiselessly turned the handle. The door gave way beneath his touch, and he looked in.

The room was empty !

Bloxam could scarcely believe his senses.

So far as the darkness would permit him he peered into every corner, but could see nothing. Then he entered and cautiously proceeded round the walls, touching them with his hands.

On the mantelpiece he came upon a box of matches and a candle, which he lighted, putting it on the floor to shade the light.

Having satisfied himself that the chamber was vacant, he gave a long low whistle, and remained in expectation of the lady's advent.

No sooner was the signal heard, than Dalilah broke away from Thornton, who, however, followed close upon her footsteps, and rushed into the house and up the staircase.

On the top of the landing she was confronted by Bloxam.

'We're done, ma'am !' he exclaimed ; 'clean done, as ever I was in my life. Sir Gilbert is not here ; the whole house is empty.'

'Sir Gilbert not here !' cried Dalilah.

'No, indeed,' said Bloxam, 'though he must have left very recently and unexpectedly. Here is his hat, and here are traces in this plate and glass of his having dartaken of food here ; but they must have obtained some notion of our intention, through treachery or

otherwise, and have carried him off to some other hiding-place.'

'Good heavens!' said Dalilah, 'is this to be the end of all our plans?—after we have succeeded thus far, to be balked at last! Has your search been thorough? Let me examine the room with you.'

'You can examine it as much as you please, madam,' said Bloxam, leading the way.

Dalilah rushed in, and eagerly scanned the apartment on every side.

'What is this?' she cried, stopping in a corner by the window; 'here is an outlet of some sort, surely: is not this a secret door?'

'What sharp eyes the woman has!' said Bloxam to himself. 'There is a door here certainly, which I never observed before. Now, how to open it?'

'See!' cried Dalilah, 'it is a rose-patterned paper; one of the roses here projects. Can that be any clue?'

'What a first-rate detective you would have made, madam!' cried Bloxam. 'That ought to be a spring. Yes, by Jove it is!'

The door opened in front of them, and revealed a long corridor running the width of the house.

'I will just examine that,' said Bloxam.

'No, not you, but I,' cried Dalilah; and she rushed through the doorway.

Meanwhile let us return to the movements of the other party.

Tom had scaled the tree and given the signal, and was astonished to find it not replied to. Ascending higher up the branches, he gained the level of the sill, and swung himself up to it and crouched upon it.

Then he found, to his dismay, that the window was open and the room empty.

He returned hurriedly and gave information to Constance. She was thunderstruck and overwhelmed with wretchedness at his intelligence.

While they were in the act of consulting on what was best to be done, the whistle given by Bloxam as his signal struck upon their ears.

Noting the quarter from whence it came, Tom quickly hurried round to the other side of the house facing the back-water.

The other constables had withdrawn to the boat, and the coast was clear.

The open door immediately struck Tom's attention, and he passed through it, followed by Constance, who was close upon his track.

Tom at once made for Sir Gilbert's room, and rushed in. It was empty, but there was a sound of the tramp of feet and the murmur of voices in some concealed place close by.

'Do you hear that, miss?' he cried, turning to Constance; 'there is some one in the neighbourhood who—'

Ah, that door! He pointed to it, but as he spoke Dalilah rushed through the opening into the room. Her cloak had fallen off her in her flight, and her resemblance to Constance was appalling.

Tom stood looking from one to the other for an instant, thinking he must be mad; then turning to Dalilah, he suddenly screamed out,

'Lucy, Lucy! it must be you this time, my long-lost love!'

He made towards her as though he would throw him-

self at her feet ; but by this time Bloxam and Thornton had returned from searching the corridor, and the latter, firmly convinced now that Davis's suspicions of an ambush were genuine, seized Dalilah in his arms, and hurrying past Constance, bore her away downstairs.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IKKY'S REVENGE.

Tom stood petrified.

When he recovered his senses, he found himself alone with Constance.

Dalilah, Thornton, and Bloxam had disappeared.

It was evident to them that they had been forestalled in their intention of removing Sir Gilbert, and they could only imagine that he had been taken away to some other place of captivity.

Who those then present were, Bloxam neither knew nor cared ; though when for an instant his eye lighted on the troubled features of Sledgehammer Tom, he seemed to have some indistinct recollection of him. It was clear, however, that no credit was to be gained from farther pursuance of the affair at that moment, and it was useless to waste the time of the officers in attempting to investigate what had been done. That would be his own special task at some future opportunity.

So Tom was left alone with Constance. On coming to himself he found her seated on a chair, her face buried in her hands. He walked quietly over to her, and touched her gently and respectfully on the shoulder. She looked up, and he saw that her face was blistered with tears.

‘You must not be down-hearted, miss,’ he said. ‘We have failed once, but we will win in the end, depend upon it. I did my best, as it was.’

‘I know that,’ said Constance; ‘I have no complaint to make against you; but the events of to-night have been too horrible. I feel as though I could not possibly realise them. Who was she that came in from the opposite side of the apartment? Was it a real woman, or merely a phantom of my diseased imagination? I seemed to see in her an exact reflection of myself.’

‘Who that was I can scarcely tell you, miss. You recollect on that night when I first saw you, I screamed out, thinking you was my lost love; and now to-night when I saw her, I thought she was—for you are as like as two peas, and it would be impossible to tell which was which.’

‘I myself perceived the likeness,’ said Constance, ‘even in that horrid moment which we had together. But she is gone, and her companions with her. Let us too get out of this dreadful place.’

‘It is quite time we were moving, miss,’ said Tom; ‘we’ve nothing more to do here, and must make the best of our way back. We have failed now; but, as I said before, we will try again, and depend upon it we shall succeed in the end.’

They left the room, and passed down the staircase and through the deserted house. They found their companions in the boat, much mystified at the noise which they had heard going on within the house, but of which they had found no results. Constance and Tom took their places again in the stern, and the boat was rowed off in the direction of London.

When Tom had seen Constance safely to her own house, he started off to get back to town as quickly as possible.

His mates had determined to pass the remainder of the night in the neighbourhood of Twickenham, where they could pull the boat on to the foreshore of some river-side public-house, which would afford them accommodation. But the events of the night had rendered Sledgehammer Tom restless and unsettled. He determined to get back as quickly as possible; he felt a craving on him, which he could not explain, to return to his lodgings. He felt the weight of some approaching calamity, and could not tell what was hanging over him.

So he journeyed on, now taking a long spell of walking, now getting occasional lifts in market-carts filled with vegetable produce and making their way towards Covent-garden.

At Hammersmith he felt so thoroughly tired out, that he gladly accepted an offer made to him to perch himself on the top of a huge pile of cabbages, drawn by four horses and driven by a good-natured rustic. Tom tried to hold a conversation with this worthy; but fatigue overpowered him, and in a very few minutes he fell sound asleep. He was only awoke by the vehicle coming to a standstill in the market.

Jumping up and rubbing his eyes, he rapidly descended to the ground. Thanking his friend, who declined his offer of some beer on the plea that he must at once attend to the stabling of his horses and the unpacking of his wagon, Tom made his way up Drury-lane, and speedily reached the court in which his lodging was situated.

That same feeling of impending calamity was strong upon him as he opened the door and passed up the creaking staircase to his wretched room.

Before throwing himself on his truckle-bed he saw something on the rickety table which attracted his attention.

It was a dirty bit of paper twisted into the form of a note.

He opened it and read :

‘Come down to-morrow night about ten ; don’t fail. There is work to be done.’

It was in the handwriting of Ikey Levy, and bore date the previous evening.

Again the feeling of coming danger, as he read the note.

Should he avoid this interview, fly from London, and endeavour to begin a new life in a different place ? No, that would never do ; there was the lady to be thought of. He must work for her till she had attained the object which so deeply interested her.

What was that vision which he had seen in the lone house on the island ? Could it have been Lucy ?

He pressed his hands to his throbbing temples. He could not think of that, of anything, till he had had rest ; so he flung himself upon the bed, and in a moment was sound asleep.

The day had passed and evening arrived when Tom awoke.

His rest had somewhat refreshed him ; but that dreadful aching pain at his heart was still there. He got up and dashed some cold water over his head, and prepared himself to go out.

His first visit was to a neighbouring cook-shop,

where he procured some cold dressed meat. This he took to a public-house, and ate it standing at the bar.

He was known there, and if the landlord did not know his occupation, most probably he guessed at it; but his house was frequented by people of that kind, and he lived upon them, so wisely took no notice of their proceedings. The landlord, however, could not help observing that Tom's manner was different from the usual cheery devil-may-care swagger which characterised him, and he took occasion to mention it.

Tom excused himself by saying that he had been up all night, and that he had not recovered his fatigue.

So the matter passed by; but Tom's dejection was not removed by finding that his inward feelings were thus reflected by his outer man.

It was now getting on for the time when he should keep his appointment with the Jew. He accordingly made his way over to Ikey's house, and giving the well-known signal, was speedily admitted.

The old man was in the back-kitchen, bent over some papers, which he hastily stuffed into a drawer on Tom's approach. He looked up, and a malicious leer overspread his face as he saw his victim.

'Why, Tom, my lad,' he said, 'this is a sight for sore eyes; I was afraid you had broken with me, and picked-up some other pal. You won't find one that will treat you better—ay, or pay you better—than old Ikey, though old Ikey himself says it. Where have you been, lad, these last few days?'

'Ill and out of sorts,' said Tom; 'that's where I've been.'

'Well, but you was not in bed, you know, or even at

home, because I looked round at your crib, to see what you was about.'

'I was sick and ill, I tell you. I am country-bred, you know; too much of your London dirt and smoke kills me. I am obliged to hook it every now and then somewhere, where I can find fresh air and green fields and flowers, and those things that I was accustomed to and bred among.'

'Ah, beautiful!' said the Jew; 'what a blessing it must be to have such simple tastes! Now, town is quite good enough for me; and I am only ill when I go into the country. I like the rattle of the cabs, and the sight of the gas; that's what keeps me up. I get horribly moped and dull in that blessed silence, where there is nothing but birds singing. Well, anyhow I am glad you have come back. Just sit down here—no, not there, in this chair opposite to me.'

The Jew pulled a chair immediately facing his own, and in front of the doorway through which Tom had entered.

Tom seated himself in it, with his back to the door.

'You said you had got some work on hand?' said he.

'So I have,' said the Jew; 'a beautiful bit of work—just the exact sort of thing as will suit you; and a great deal to be made out of it, my dear boy,—a great deal to be made out of it.'

'Tell us what it is,' said Tom.

'I will tell you in a minute,' said the Jew, looking uneasily at the door over Tom's head. 'There's only one thing I must impress upon you: be punctual.'

'Punctual!' echoed Tom; 'ain't I always punctual at my work?'

‘No,’ cried the Jew, ‘not always, my dear. Sometimes you come *just one hour too late!*’

As the Jew spoke he threw up his hand as a signal, and the next instant Tom sank senseless to the floor, having been felled by a terrific blow on his head delivered from behind.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BLOXAM HAS HOPES.

MAJOR MAITLAND was seated in his lodging the day ~~but~~ one after the attempt at rescuing Sir Gilbert, which had resulted in such signal failure.

The Major was walking impatiently up and down the room, now stopping to beat the devil's tattoo with his fingers on the table, now drumming on the window, now passing by the door and listening as though expecting some approaching footstep.

The room was strewn with luggage: two portmantaus, hat-box, dressing-case, despatch-box and gun-case were there. It was evident that the Major was on the eve of departure from London.

Autumn had arrived, and all the fashionables had departed: the Major was a fashionable man, and could not bear to be left alone. Hitherto he had remained beyond any of his friends, in the hope that he might have been of some service to Sir Gilbert.

Bloxam had promised him news, and the Major had waited on accordingly. At last even his patience had given way, and he was on the point of starting for his shooting quarters in Scotland, when he received a note from Bloxam telling him to expect a visit from that

worthy the next morning: that morning had now arrived, and the Major was in expectation.

‘What a confounded time this fellow is!’ said the Major to himself as he walked up and down his room; then consulting his watch: ‘No; he appointed twelve, and it is not that yet; it must have been a month since I had breakfast, and a twelvemonth since I woke this morning. I wonder what news he will have to bring. So many weeks have now elapsed since this unfortunate fellow was spirited away in so mysterious a manner, that I almost begin to fear for our chances of recovering him. By all I can make out, I cannot help thinking that one life already—that of the unfortunate Sergeant Bentley—has been lost in the pursuit, and we don’t seem any nearer to the end yet. This what’s his name, Bloxam, who writes to me and says he has something to communicate about it, who can he be? He dates from Scotland-yard, and says he has been employed in the search for Sir Gilbert Montacute; employed by whom? Not by me certainly, nor by Miss Brailsford: he cannot be the mysterious man of whom Miss Brailsford spoke to me as being devoted to her.’

A clock on the mantelpiece rang out at the moment.

‘Twelve! Mr. Bloxam’s time; now we shall soon know all about him.’

At that moment a knock came at the outer door; the Major called out ‘Come in!’ and Bloxam entered.

‘I have the honour of speaking to Major Maitland?’ said he.

‘That is my name,’ said the Major. ‘You are Mr. Bloxam, I suppose?’

‘I am. You received a note from me?’

‘I did, and expected you in consequence. In that

note you said you had been engaged in the search after my friend Sir Gilbert Montacute; is that correct?’

‘Perfectly correct, Major.’

‘By whom are you so employed?’

‘I am not at liberty to say.’

‘Well, sir,’ said the Major testily, ‘of course you are the best judge as to how you can admit me into your confidence. Since you are so mysterious, we had better come to the point at once. Have you discovered Sir Gilbert’s retreat?’

‘I *had*.’

‘Had! What do you mean by *had*?’

‘Simply what I say, Major. I had tracked Sir Gilbert Montacute to a lone house—’

‘Ah, ha!’ interrupted the Major; ‘then my suspicions were correct; well, go on.’

‘I made every arrangement to rescue him from that place, and the night before last the rescue was attempted. I suppose our plan had got wind somehow, for when we arrived at the place the bird was flown.’

‘Flown! Not there!’

‘Not there. The house was empty; I searched from attic to basement.’

‘What do you gather from this?’ said the Major in astonishment.

‘That he had been removed to some place which is possibly more secure and certainly more remote.’

‘And you have no notion where that place may be?’

‘At present not the least in the world.’

‘Then what, in the name of fortune, is your object in coming to me?’

‘Simply to ask you to delay your departure to Scotland for a few days.’

‘How on earth did you know I was going to Scotland?’

‘We manage to know most things in my business, Major,’ said Bloxam with a quiet smile.

‘And your business is?’

‘A sergeant in the Detective-Police Force.’

‘But how on earth did you discover that I was going to Scotland?’ said the Major. ‘I am not being watched by detectives, am I?’

‘Not at all,’ said Bloxam with another smile. ‘The facts are simply these :

‘A large parcel of bank-notes passing through the Post-office was stolen a few days since. We are tolerably certain who has them in his possession ; we know that he is at present in London, and that he will endeavour to make his way out of it as soon as he can with safety. We have a man at every outport, and information of all passengers by out-going steamers is telegraphed to us daily ; but the man in question is too knowing a card to attempt to leave England in that way. He will work out of the country quietly through some far-off seaport—Greenock, or Glasgow, or one of those, in all probability ; so that not only are all the passengers going North from Euston quietly inspected by our men, but a list of persons who engage seats in the limited mail is forwarded to our office. In that list for to-night I find your name booked as far as Aberdeen. That is the whole mystery.’

‘Devilish clever, by Jove !’ said the Major. ‘I had no idea such things went on in the nineteenth century. And you want me to delay my departure for the present ?’

‘For your friend’s sake, I must ask you to do so.’

‘How long must it be before I can get to my shooting?’

‘Three or four days at the utmost. I hope by that time, if all goes well, I shall have some kind of a clue, at all events as to the direction in which these gentlemen have made off with their prey?’

‘And I am to remain in London that time?’

‘I don’t stipulate for that; only I want you to be within call of a telegram—within two or three hours’ distance from town.’

‘Pity I refused Sir John Dubois’s offer,’ said the Major, as though thinking aloud.

‘May I ask what that offer might have been?’ said Bloxam.

‘My friend Sir John Dubois placed his steam-yacht at my disposal for a fortnight or three weeks.’

‘A steam-yacht!’ said Bloxam; ‘may I ask what tonnage is she?’

‘She is a large vessel of about 150 or 200 tons,’ said the Major.

‘Good!’ said Bloxam. ‘Does she carry a gun?’

‘What an extraordinary question!’ said the Major; ‘however, I am able to answer it. She does, I believe, carry two guns.’

‘Very good indeed,’ said Bloxam, rubbing his hands. ‘And where is she?’

‘She is at present lying in Southampton Water,’ said the Major.

‘Excellent!’ said Bloxam; ‘better and better still. You may go to Southampton, Major.’

‘I am very much obliged to you for the permission,’ said the Major; ‘and how long may I remain there?’

‘As I said before, I hope within the next three or

four days to send you a telegram. What is the name of Sir John's yacht?

'She is called the Waterwitch.'

'Very well,' said Bloxam, making a note in his pocket-book. 'You will not think I am taking a liberty with you if a telegram comes to you having instructions from me—'

'Instructions!' cried the Major.

'I mean as to whether you are to come to town, or what you are to do. You may depend upon it, all my actions will be in the interest of your friend.'

'You seem a straightforward fellow, Mr. Bloxam, and I am content to believe you, and consent to go as you may direct. You will not tell me the name of the person by whom you are employed in this matter?'

'I cannot do that, Major; I may say that it is a lady,' said Bloxam.

'The devil!' said the Major; 'I never knew a business of this sort but there was a woman at the bottom of it.'

'Good-morning, Major,' said Bloxam with a smile. 'Next time you hear from me, I hope to send good news.'

And he bowed and withdrew.

From the Major's apartments Bloxam made his way to the Little House in Piccadilly, and asked to see Dalilah; and as she had given orders that he was to be admitted at any time, he was ushered straight into her presence.

But the detective was the first person whom Dalilah had seen since that night. Albert Schwarzberg and a host of her other admirers had called, and sent in imploring messages, but she had been denied to them all.

Her nerves were thoroughly unstrung by what she had gone through. The excitement had been too great for her, and she began to feel that the release of Sir Gilbert was now an impossibility. It seemed as though fate were against her in that most important wish of her life.

More than all, she had been completely prostrated by the sight of that other woman so exactly resembling herself. This, then, was the double of whom she had heard so much, and whose influence seemed always to be at work in parallel lines with her own. She had caught but a hurried glimpse of her; but that was enough for her to recognise the exact similarity between them: the likeness was overwhelming.

This, then, must have been the girl that Gilbert had seen at the church of the Madeleine in Paris, at the interview about which he had raved to her on their first introduction. Who could she be? What could be the motive which animated her in thus linking her fortunes with those of Gilbert Montacute? Motive! there could be but one motive—love! Love for him for whom Dalilah felt that intense yearning passion. And the demon of jealousy rose up within her, and she hated her rival, and determined to come between her and Gilbert Montacute.

Dalilah was reclining on a sofa, stretched listlessly at full length, when her French waiting-maid ushered Bloxam into the apartment.

She raised her head carelessly, but on seeing who it was, she moved into a sitting position, and bade her visitor take a chair to which she pointed.

‘Sorry to find you in this condition, madam,’ said Bloxam; ‘I’m afraid you are suffering from the results of our little amusement the other evening.’

‘Amusement do you call it!’ said Dalilah bitterly; ‘it nearly cost me my life.’

‘Not so bad as that, I hope, madam,’ said Bloxam. ‘We were unfortunate, that was all; next time let us hope we shall do better.’

‘Next time!’ cried Dalilah; ‘when’s next time to be! How long have I waited in expectation of being able to effect this release! and now, when everything seemed ready to our hand, I have to undergo this frightful disappointment.’

‘You recollect the story of the spider which they tell in the history-books. Some Scotch king who had come to grief—I forget what his name was—was almost as down in the mouth as you are, madam, about this job; he was lying in his bed, when he noticed a spider trying to climb from one place to another, and failed many times—half a dozen in all—but the seventh he did it. And the Scotch king plucked-up heart, and determined he would take example by the spider, and have another go in, and the next time he won. We have only failed once yet, and my belief is that it will come all right next time.’

‘Have you any grounds for this belief?’

‘Well, yes, ma’am; I have been thinking it over, and I see my way, at all events, to something like a clue. You recollect the people we saw there—not our people, but some we saw belonging to another party that we met in a mysterious manner, and saw like a flash of lightning, only for an instant?’

‘I do indeed,’ said Dalilah, with a shudder.

‘Well, when I saw that man come out of the door in the wall which I had not noticed before, it struck me all of a sudden that his face was familiar to me, though

I couldn't put a name to it, or tell where I had seen him. I can put faces away in my mind just as I can scraps of paper in a pocket-book, and bring them out and look at them whenever I want. I have been thinking over this man in that way, and I am pretty certain I have hit upon who he is.'

'Who is he?' asked Dalilah eagerly.

'He is a cracksman, ma'am, which is our kind of French for a burglar; and he belongs to a set of ruffians known as the Jimmy gang, of whom an old man named Ikey Levy is the head and chief. Now I happen to know that this same cracksman, who is called Sledgehammer Tom, has not been so thick with his pals of late, and that there is some suspicion of him among them. When you join to this the fact—which is a fact, as I know from information I have received—that Ikey Levy has recently been in confidential confab with a certain great foreign nobleman, whose name I need not mention, it would look at the first blush as though Sledgehammer Tom had been employed by his chief to remove Sir Gilbert to some other hiding-place. But when you take into consideration that Tom has to a certain extent split with his pals, and that he was at the house on the river just as we were—that is to say, a little too late—my belief is that he must have been on the other tack.'

'I cannot follow this explanation,' said Dalilah; 'I don't see at what you are aiming.'

'Simply this, ma'am,' said Bloxam: 'I am aiming to show you that there were two parties to rescue Sir Gilbert, and one to take him to a different spot, and that by an odd chance we all hit upon the same night for carrying out our plans. Well, we have got now two strings to our bow, as it were. I shall have a strict

watch kept on Sledgehammer Tom, and on Ikey Levy's friends. If Tom is pulling with Ikey Levy, we shall have two chances of finding what they are up to; if Tom is not pulling with that gang, we may manage to get hold of him, and make him a valuable assistance to ourselves. In any case, with two such firm holds as these, I don't think we shall be long before we find out some trace of Sir Gilbert.'

'I am glad to hear what you say, Bloxam,' said Dalilah. 'There,' she added, opening a desk, and taking from it a bank-note, which she handed to him, 'is money for your expenses. Be faithful; be vigilant.'

'You may depend upon my giving you the earliest information in my power, madam,' said Bloxam as he bowed and withdrew.

When she was alone, Dalilah threw herself back upon her couch, and buried her face in the cushion.

'He did not speak about the woman,' moaned she in a low voice; 'and I dared not ask him. She will be the curse of my life; I feel she will be the curse of my life!'

CHAPTER XXXV.

WALLS HAVE EARS.

TWELVE o'clock at night, and the entertainments at the St. Helena Gardens of Woolwich are over.

There have been splendid fireworks and extra thousands of lamps, and everything has gone-off to the intense delight of an enormous body of visitors.

Now they are all making the best of their way out of the gardens, and there is a vast amount of pushing and crowding, and the weaker, as is usually the case, go to the wall.

One young lady—a very pretty girl of a certain order, rather loud and flashy, with long ringlets and brilliant black eyes—seemed in a great fright of being crushed; and it needed all the attentions of her cavalier, a tall strong man of about thirty years of age with a large black beard, to prevent her from screaming.

The more attentions he paid, the better pleased she seemed.

He was a capital hand in a crowd, this big man; where his strong shoulders were of no avail, his wheedling tongue was of service to him. For he cracked his jokes merrily, and had a word of chaff for every one about him, and this made him popular with the crowd; so that in a few minutes he was able to steer his way

out, and put himself and his charge into the first cab which they encountered at the gates.

When the cab had started off to the address which the driver had received, the tall man slipped his arm round his companion's waist, and expressed his hope that she had had a pleasant evening.

'I never enjoyed myself so much in my life, Mr. Clifton—well then, Arthur, if you like me to call you so; what a pretty name it is!'

'And you will come again some other evening?' said the man.

'Whenever you like to ask me, Arthur; that is, whenever I can get the chance. Lord! only to think of them at home believing I am staying with aunt Tabitha at Greenwich, and not knowing you at all, Arthur, and never having seen you! I wish you'd let me bring you to see father.'

'So you shall, my dear; but not yet. When I know that you are as fond of me as you say you are, then I will go to your father, and talk about being spliced.'

'Fond of you!' said the girl, nestling closely to him; 'you know I'm fond of you.'

'I am going to ask you to give me a proof,' said the man.

'A proof!' cried the girl; 'what can that be?'

'Nothing that shall get you into trouble, or do you any harm,' said the man. 'I want you to let a friend of mine into your bar to-morrow night, that's all.'

'He shall come in and welcome,' said the girl.

'Ah, but he must not be seen there, that's just the point of it.'

'Not seen! How do you mean!'

'I have a friend in the carpenter business,' said the

man, 'who, before your father took that house, was employed in making some repairs there, and he found that between the bar and the room at the back of it there is a passage big enough to hold a man, which is entered by removing the press that stands at the right-hand of the bar-engine.'

'Lor'!' said the girl, 'what a very curious thing! I'm sure none of us knew of such a place.'

'Perhaps not, my dear; but there it is notwithstanding. Now at ten o'clock to-morrow night an old gentleman whom I know, and whom you know very well, will come with a friend to have a chat in the inside parlour. It is of great importance to me in my trade to learn what these two say, and I want you to take a slim young fellow, whom I will send you, and get him securely hid in this passage, where he can listen to all that goes on.'

'Lor', Arthur, what a curious thing!' said the girl. 'Who is the old gentleman?'

'Mr. Levy,' said the man.

'What, the old marine-store dealer! How could he have anything to say that will interest you?'

'He knows something of some consignments of goods that are coming over from China, my dear; and if I get the information, I can go early into the market, and turn a few hundreds; and as soon as that is done, you shall take me to your father, and we'll ask his blessing.'

'I don't think it would be difficult,' said the girl; 'mother and Mary are staying at Margate, and father has been tolerably on the drink for the last three days, or I should not have managed to blind him about aunt Tabitha. Your friend won't be particular to a quarter of an hour or so, will he?'

‘He will come just when you like, and you can let him out whenever you feel it safe to do so. He is not one of the particular ones,’ said the man, with a grin.

‘What time do you say Mr. Levy is coming?’

‘At ten.’

‘Well then, let your friend come into our bar at a quarter past nine, let him carry a flower in his mouth, and ask for a pint of shandygaff; I shall know then who it is, and I will take care of him.’

‘You are a duck!’ said the man; and he gave her a hearty kiss.

At a little before ten the next evening old Ikey Levy might have been seen stumbling up George-street Minories.

As usual, the people are sitting on their chairs in the street, and the old man has to wind his way in and out among them, and seems in a remarkably good temper. He was in truth overjoyed at the success which had attended his removal of Sir Gilbert, and as he passed along he distributed his smiles and jokes in quite a lavish manner.

Arrived at the Lamb and Flag, he pushed open the swing-doors and made his way to the bar.

There he found Miss Burdock, with her flashing eyes and her long ringlets.

She coloured at the sight of him. The Jew noticed this, and wondered.

‘Any one for me, Miss Sally?’ he asked.

‘O yes, Mr. Levy, there is a strange gentleman been asking for you; he has gone into the parlour.’

‘Halyard Jack has been giving Miss Sally a kiss, I suppose,’ said the Jew to himself with a grin, ‘that

caused her to blush so ; he was always a devil after the girls.' Then he said aloud, ' I will join him. Bring us a shillingsworth of hot rum each, my dear, and don't let us be disturbed.'

He passed through into the parlour.

There, seated at the table, was a wiry sinewy man of small stature and about fifty years of age. His face was bronzed and weatherbeaten, and his short grizzly hair curled gracefully round his head. He had a bushy grizzly beard, and was dressed in a rough pilot-coat and trousers of coarse blue material ; a glazed hat lay on the table by him.

' Well, Jack,' said the old man, going in, ' you are here before me.'

' Why, skipper, I thought you were never going to make the harbour,' said Jack. ' I have been lying off here for the last half hour ; and if you had not come now, I should have thrown-up a signal of distress and asked that tight little craft outside if she would not take me in tow.'

' You rascal !' said the old man with a grin, ' you have taken her in tow already, I think, by the way in which she blushed when I asked her if you were here.— Ah, he is a very wicked man, Sally,' said the old man to the girl, as she came with the steaming grog ; ' but I will take him in hand now, and see that he is not rude to you again.'

' You did not think it rude, did you, Poll, my princess ?' said Halyard Jack, kissing his hand to her.

' Get along with your impudence !' said Miss Sally, by no means displeased, as she flounced out of the room.

' Now then to business, skipper,' said Jack, after a

long pull at his grog ; ' I have been expecting sailing orders from you for some time past.'

' Yes,' said the Jew, ' I had hoped to give you employment earlier, Jack, but it could not be.'

' And what's the little game this time ?' said Jack ; ' anything that you want to get rid of, to be taken across the water ?'

' Not any *thing*,' said the Jew with a smile.

' What do you mean ?' asked Jack.

' I want you to carry a live burden this time.'

' A man ?' asked Jack.

The Jew smiled, but did not speak.

' Not a woman !' cried Jack, clapping his hands.

' No, my dear, not so bad as that. I want you to look after two men. But that is not equal to one *woman*, you know, in point of devilry and wickedness.'

' Two men !' cried Jack ; ' how is that ?'

' Well, it was to have been only one at first,' said the Jew ; ' but I have found another one since, who is so fond of his friend that it would be a pity to separate them ; so,' he added with a grin, ' you shall take them both away together.'

' Two is rather a dose,' said Jack, shaking his head dubiously. ' They must be kept separate, I suppose ?'

' I should rather think they must,' said the Jew.

' You won't be very particular as to their having everything, I suppose ?' asked Jack. ' Our hold is very dark, and there ain't too much room for 'em to sit upright, specially the one as is put in the stern-sheets, where the rudder works.'

' It cannot be too dark or too cramped to punish them,' said the Jew ; ' one of them especially—a treacherous vagabond, that I should like to take the life of.'

‘Why don’t you?’ said Jack.

‘Because I am a cautious man, my dear, and don’t do rash things,’ said the Jew. ‘You wonder, I daresay, why we meet here to-night instead of at the usual place at Joe Wedgwood’s.’

‘Well, I did wonder,’ said Jack. ‘Rotherhithe is nearer for me.’

‘Yes, but there was some awkward business there some little time back,’ said the Jew with a shudder, ‘and the place has got a bad name, and I think it always best to keep away from a tainted house. However, that is neither here nor there; the question is, can you make room for these two passengers?’

‘How far do you want me to take them?’ said Jack.

‘I shall come on board with them myself, and give you your sailing orders then; but it won’t be farther than your last run.’

‘And the figure?’ asked Jack.

‘The same as last time,’ said the Jew.

‘And ten to it,’ said Jack.

‘Couldn’t be done,’ said the Jew.

‘Then you will have to take your passengers by the General Steam Navigation Company, or some other way, for I’m damned if I will carry them,’ said Jack.

‘Well, we won’t fight about ten pounds,’ said the Jew. ‘Now when can you be ready to start?’

‘Well, the Saucy Sally will want about three or four days to get her sailing-gear ready. She has not been out for some months, as I have been doing a little land-business; but I should say in less than a week we can be ready for you.’

‘Good!’ said the Jew. ‘You shall hear details from me later. In the mean time get the Saucy Sally ready,

and expect me and my people on board on the fifth day from this.'

'Where will you want her?' asked Jack.

'Where is she lying now?' asked the Jew.

'Off Dungeness,' said Jack.

'As good a place as any other,' said the Jew—'dull, dreary, and out of the way. Keep her off Dungeness, and expect us there.'

After a few words of general conversation, they rose and left the house together.

Two days afterwards Major Maitland received at Southampton the following telegram:

'Keep the Waterwitch with her steam up and her guns shotted. I may be with you at any moment.

'B.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONSTANCE AND HER FATHER.

Two days after the unsuccessful attempt which Constance had made for the rescue of Sir Gilbert, her health, which had been greatly shaken by the excitement of that night, broke down entirely.

General Brailsford on his return from London, where he had been to transact some important business, found his daughter was so ill that she had been compelled to take to her bed, and on visiting her discovered that she was in a high state of fever.

The General's practised eye detected the symptoms at once. He had been too long in positions of importance, when the absence of any recognised medical officer compelled him to be the medical as well as the military officer of the troops under his command, not to see at a glance that the case was one certainly serious, if not fraught with danger.

The village doctor had already been summoned; the General dispatched an express to London for the first physician of the day; and in the mean time tended his daughter's couch and watched the progress of the disease—for it undoubtedly was making progress—with the greatest anxiety.

As, late in the evening, he was seated by his

daughter's side, watching her tossing to and fro in disquietude, and listening with inexpressible sorrow to the few broken phrases which in the first access of her wanderings—for her mind was scarcely under her control—she was uttering from time to time, there was a sound of wheels on the gravel path beneath the window, and the General, rising and descending to the hall, encountered Dr. Modus, who had just alighted from his carriage.

A pleasing agreeable gentleman, with none of the stiffness or formality which characterised his predecessors of former years.

Dr. Modus found time, even during the exercise of the best possible practice, to go much into society. He was always seen on the grand nights at the opera and at the best of all the fashionable parties. He took care to keep himself conversant with the latest literature of the day, and the large basket in his brougham always bore an ample supply of magazines, pamphlets, and books of the omnipresent Mudie.

There was no one better versed in the current scandal of the day than Dr. Modus. From the nature of his position, mixing both with those who were the subjects of the talk and those who were the spreaders of it, he usually had some reliable information for the foundation of his gossip, and there was no one better able to build up a superstructure of circumstantial detail than the garrulous little doctor.

But with all this he was a man of consummate skill, and, what was even better still, of great common sense.

After a few ordinary words of greeting in the hall, the General led Dr. Modus into the dining-room, and

there gave him a concise history of the case which he had been called upon to attend. As he sipped a glass of old East-India sherry which the butler had poured out for him, held it between his eye and the lamp, and swallowed every drop with the gusto of a connoisseur, the doctor listened to his host, nodding his head sapiently the while, and occasionally throwing in an ejaculation.

When the General's narration and the second glass of sherry had come to an end about the same time, Dr. Modus expressed his desire to see the patient. The General led him to Constance's room, where, tended by the faithful Sophie and a hired nurse, Constance was lying tossing wearily to and fro upon her couch, and moaning in low but heart-rending tones.

As the sound struck upon his ear, the General would have hastened to his daughter's side; but Dr. Modus laid his hand gently upon his host's arm, and motioning him to keep in the background, crept on tip-toe to the bed. Then he laid his hand lightly upon the girl's head, and bending over her, steadied her face for a moment between his palms, and gazed into her eyes; then he clasped her pulse with his long lithe fingers, and laying her arm back again gently upon the coverlid, turned round, and with a sufficiently explanatory shoulder-shrug said to the General,

'A decided case of fever, my dear sir—decided and acute.'

'And you mean to tell me that my darling is in danger, doctor?' asked the General.

'If you put the question so plainly to me,' said the doctor, 'I must certainly say yes. This young lady's pulse is beating more than one hundred and fifty per

minute, her head and hands are burning hot, and, as you yourself can easily see, there is a slight access of delirium, as we professionals call it, or, as you say, she is a little light-headed. Still, with all this, I don't think there is any reason for you to alarm yourself; fortunately, the latter has been treated in time, and the local practitioner whom you have called in, and whom I should have been pleased to have met, has done everything that under the circumstances possibly could be thought of. If you will allow me to retire with you to the library, I will write a prescription for some medicine which should be given Miss Brailsford to-night, and I will drive down to-morrow afternoon, and trust to find her, if not considerably better, at all events relieved from the acute access which now oppresses her.'

The General bowed and led the way into the library. When they arrived there, and the door was securely shut behind them, Dr. Modus turned to his host and said,

'I could not ask you, my dear sir, before the lady's-maid and the nurse, but it will materially assist my diagnosis of the case and guide me as to my treatment of it, if you will tell me whether in your knowledge Miss Brailsford has recently been suffering under more than ordinary mental excitement.'

The General looked blankly at his visitor, and shook his head.

Dr. Modus at once saw that his question had not been comprehended.

'You will pardon me, my dear sir,' he said, 'if I put this more plainly before you, and ask you whether within your knowledge Miss Brailsford has been engaged in—in—well, say in a love-affair, for instance,

which might have tended to overthrow her mental equilibrium, and bring on an access of fever, from which she is now suffering.'

The General looked more blankly than ever, but replied,

'So far as I know, nothing—not the least in the world.'

Dr. Modus laid his hand again on his host's arm, and said,

'Recollect, my dear sir, that in cases like these the physician should be as much trusted as the priest. My treatment of the case will be materially affected by my knowledge of it; and unless every confidence is given to me, that knowledge will be naturally imperfect.'

'I can assure you, my dear doctor, that so far as I know, there is nothing of the kind. Miss Brailsford has been staying away a good deal lately, and, as a man of the world, you will perfectly understand that there are a great many subjects as to her feelings about which the young girl of twenty is not likely to confide in her father; but I repeat that, so far as I know, there is nothing of the sort.'

'So far as you know,' said the little doctor, with a smile. 'Your use of that phrase, my dear General, proves your knowledge of the world. I confess, that without the existence of any such cause, the attack, in its present shape, seems to me almost inexplicable. However, the great point is, that its virulence should be got under as speedily as possible; and when I return to-morrow, I trust to find that we have taken the necessary measures for subduing it.'

The doctor was gone, and his pair of neat little cobs was whirling him to London at the rate of fourteen

miles an hour. The General had seen him to the door, had seen the light of his carriage-lamps die away in the distance, and had then returned into the house. Not to Constance's room, though; he had matter for cogitation before he went there. He returned to the library, and sat himself down in his arm-chair, pondering over the words uttered by the visitor who had just departed.

'So far as you know'—that was what he had said. The doctor had asked him whether Constance had been mentally excited by any love-affair; and when he had replied in the negative, had said, 'So far as you know.'

Was it an impertinence? No; rather the sensible utterance of a man of the world. What bond was between him and his daughter that she should give her confidence to him? He had been a kind father as far as fathers went, but he had never sought to make himself sufficiently a companion to his daughter to invite her to place such trust in him. Could the doctor be right? could any man have been playing with his child's affections?

The General rose as the thought flashed across his mind, and strode angrily up and down the room. What thoughts came crowding upon him as he thus paced the apartment! Recollections of Constance's mother: of the early days in which he wooed and won her: of his first married life, and his daughter's birth. Recollections of some one else, whom he had wooed and won before he ever saw the proud beauty whom he had led to the altar, but with whom in this case there was no holy bond, no marriage-tie. The cold beads of perspiration stood thick on the General's forehead as he reflected over his early life. Were the sins of the father indeed to be visited upon the child? Was his only daughter

to be the victim of that passion which he had contrived to manage so successfully—cajoling here, meeting it there, now pressing, now giving way to it, but always managing to become its victor? Was she to be equally under its domination, without the power of coping with it as he had done? Was this access of fever really the result of some disappointment in love? And if so, who could be the object?

The General stopped suddenly in his perambulations as a thought flashed across his brain. That man whom they had met at the water-party given by Mrs. Mapleton—Prince Polonia, as he was called. The General recollected that between this man and Constance some sign of mutual recognition had certainly taken place. They each strove their best to conceal it. He had intended asking his daughter what it meant after their return; but it had passed out of his mind, and he had neglected to do so. If she were spared, if the danger which Dr. Modus had hinted at passed away, he would take an early opportunity of satisfying himself on that point; and if this foreign Prince had dared to indulge himself in playing with Constance's feelings, he should pay the penalty of his temerity.

Next day the doctor's swift-trotting cobs brought him again to the Twickenham villa. He saw the patient, and his report was infinitely more satisfactory. The delirium had passed away, the fever was sensibly subdued, and it might be said the danger was over. But the girl remained in her room very weak, and any idea of excitement for her was strictly forbidden.

It was not until the lapse of a fortnight that the General thought he might fairly broach the subject which so long had occupied his mind. The fiery finger

of autumn had been laid upon the leaves, and all the woods bordering the noble river were clad in a red and russet mantle, when the General, sitting by the side of the couch on which Constance lay, and which had been wheeled to the window, thought that without any chance of incurring a relapse, he might ask her the question nearest his heart.

‘You are sensibly better to-night, my child,’ said he; ‘your cheek, which has hitherto been so wan, is beginning to regain its wonted roses; and Dr. Modus tells me that the pulse, which on the occasion of his first visit throbbed so fitful, and then died away to the merest thread, is now beginning to beat again with health and vigour.’

‘You are right, dearest papa. At one time, immediately after the crisis of my disorder, I felt as if I could have passed away quietly and peacefully, and without any wish to remain. But the longing of life is come upon me again, and I feel each day that I am more myself, and that life has yet a sense of enjoyment too.’

‘That is but natural, my child, and just as it should be. Now, Constance, I want to ask you a question; and I know you will answer me as befits one who has had all such indulgence as I could give her, and from the mere circumstance of being motherless has lived in freer intercourse with her father than would otherwise have been the case. This illness of yours, my child—I do not speak merely from my own observation of it, but from the more practical deductions of Dr. Modus—was brought about by some great mental excitement. I am right, Constance, in saying this?’

Constance did not reply; but from her rising blush her father knew that his arrow had hit the mark.

‘I do not wish to pry into your secrets; but you are my daughter; and dear to me as my own honour is, and as I have always held it, yours is infinitely dearer. Some love-affair, Constance, is at the bottom of this.’

The girl was still silent, and the blush deepened on her cheek.

‘You are silent, but your looks are sufficiently explicit. I will take it for granted that you have been in love. To what extent the object of that passion has ruined you—’

‘Father, he is the best and noblest of men!’

‘He may be so in your estimation, my child, but that is not the character which the world gives him. Prince Polonia is—’

‘Prince Polonia!’

‘Of whom else should I speak? You seem to forget that I was present at what was supposed to be your introduction to him at Mrs. Mapleton’s water-party, but it was then perfectly evident you had met before.’

‘How and when we had met, you shall hear later, papa; but be assured that the only feelings with which I regard Prince Polonia are those of detestation and abhorrence. It is time that you should be made acquainted with what has been the story of my life during the past few months. I will tell it you unreservedly and without guile, and you will then judge of your daughter’s weakness, but also of the absolute honour of him on whom, however foolishly, she has pinned her faith.’

Then, recumbent on her couch, her eyes lit-up with the warmth of the feelings which occupied her thoughts, her wan wasted hand clasped in her father’s brown and sinewy palms, Constance Brailsford poured out the story of her love for Gilbert Montacute. She described how

she had first seen him on the steps of the Madeleine in Paris, and without an interchanged word between them, she had felt the first gush of that passion which had exerted so much influence over her career. She narrated how, during her stay at Sir Gerald Griffin's, she had heard of Gilbert's abduction; how she had enlisted Bentley's services in her behalf; how that unfortunate man had been killed; and how, to a certain extent, his place had been supplied by the penitent burglar, whose escape she had connived at on the night of the attempted robbery at their house. Then, in continuance of her story, she told of her interviews with Tom, of their preparations for rescuing Sir Gilbert from the lone house in which he was immured, and of the failure of that attempt. In her own pathetic language, she set forth how the whole current of her existence seemed to verge towards the achievement of that end. And when destiny was so strong against her, how the cord relaxed at once, and, her over-taxed strength giving way, she was precipitated into that illness from which she was only then recovering.

General Brailsford listened with the greatest astonishment to his daughter's narration. At its close he bent over her couch, wound his arms around her, and clasping her to his heart, pressed a kiss upon her lips.

'It is my fault, my darling,' said he, 'that you have undergone all this mental torture. Had I encouraged you to give your confidence to me, we should have been enabled to take far more vigorous steps for the rescue of this young man, whose father was one of my oldest and dearest friends, and whose cruel fate I most sincerely deplore. But it is not too late now. Henceforward we will work hand-in-hand together in this matter.

Gilbert Montacute's release is now as much a matter of moment to me as to you; and once secure, there will be no obstacle, so far as I am concerned, to your union. The first thing to-morrow morning I will go to town, and seek an interview with Sir Gerald Griffin; and these ruffians, whoever they may be, who have plotted against Gilbert Montacute's freedom, will have all their work to do to ~~outmatch~~ not merely the diplomacy but the practical result which is likely to ensue when two military veterans of our skill and experience put their heads together for the accomplishment of an object.'

The General went to town the next day, and returned in the evening. Constance, who had been eagerly awaiting his arrival, saw at once by his face that he was the bearer of good news.

'I have talked this matter over with Sir Gerald Griffin, my dearest child,' said he; 'and have discovered that the officials in Scotland-yard have a new clue to Gilbert Montacute's hiding-place. I am strictly enjoined to say no more; but this I may tell you, that if all goes well, within a week Gilbert Montacute will be a free man; and if then he is insensible to the charms of my darling, and the love which she bears him, he will be unworthy of her bestowing another thought upon him.'

And then General Brailsford kissed his daughter, and went to bed.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A RAY OF HOPE.

DARK, pitch dark, he thought at first, the only glimpse of light coming through a lattice-work in a kind of square tower in the roof.

This was Gilbert Montacute's present place of confinement. It had been used as a brewhouse, he thought, when, his sight getting better accustomed to the gloom, he was enabled to see sufficiently to distinguish the objects around him. There was a huge but empty vat—empty, as he found on tapping it with his fingers—in one corner, a mass of rotting grains in the other, broken tubs, and rusty iron hoops which had come from them, scattered on the floor.

A pump stood in another corner, and a tin bowl and rough towel had been placed by it; a wooden table and chair, a couple of frowsy mattresses with some coarse sacking for a coverlid, comprised the furniture of the place.

Gilbert had been brought there in the dark, but, from what he had contrived to discover, the place of his confinement was an outbuilding in the court of some old-fashioned house in the southern suburbs of London. He had seen no one since his arrival except the little

lad who twice a day brought him in his portion of food. He had tried to make acquaintance with this boy, speaking to him softly, and making such advances as he thought might win the child's confidence; but he never received any answer, though he judged from the manner in which the lad looked over his shoulder towards the door whenever he was addressed, that there was some one without keeping watch upon their movements.

In his dreary solitude in this darkness, which almost prevented his distinguishing day from night, with no human companionship, seeing nothing with life in it save the rats, which, unaccustomed to disturbance, boldly frisked about the floor and made themselves happy with the grains, Sir Gilbert passed three or four miserable days. The idea of escape had, of course, occurred to him, and he had wandered round the building, searching, as best he could in the darkness, for any outlet. There was none save the door by which he had entered, and through which the boy came daily with his food; but this, except at the times of the boy's appearance, was always barred.

There was the lattice-tower in the roof, and at one time he thought that by scaling the sides of the vat he might have made his way out. But the sides of the vat were rounded and smooth, and incapable of affording him any foothold; and even had he succeeded in scaling it, he felt that the interstices of the bars in the lattice-work would be too small to admit of the passage of his body; while the bars themselves seemed to be of iron, and too firmly fixed to be wrenched out by one in his debilitated condition.

He thought, too, that even had he succeeded in get-

ting out on to the roof, he should probably find himself at a great height from the ground ; and as the building was a solitary one, there would be no chance of his making his escape, or, so far as he knew, of effecting even a safe descent.

So there he remained, succumbing to despair, and in the depth of his misery actually praying for death to release him from his suffering.

One night, as he lay stretched on the mattress, but wide awake, in a dead silence, which the dull murmur of distant vehicles and the far-off city's roar only made more painful and acute, he fancied he heard a peculiar kind of scratching noise close by his head. The rats were growing bolder, he thought, and he sat upright and knocked his hand against the wall with the intention of scaring them away. His attempt had been successful, for the noise instantly stopped, and a dead silence reigned again throughout the place. In a few minutes, however, he thought he heard a renewal of the sound. This time he raised himself on his arm and listened intently. He knew now at once that in his first idea he had been mistaken, and that this was not a noise made by rats, but the slow regular working of some instrument.

The cold sweat stood on Gilbert's brow. He was broken by confinement and anxiety and want of proper food, and his reasoning powers had almost deserted him. A multitude of horrid stories which he had heard came crowding upon his brain. Above all he recollected the tale of the Iron Shroud : how a man who had committed some offence against the Inquisition had been placed in a cell in which, on the first night of his confinement, he had counted four windows ; how the next

morning he found only three; the morning after that only two; and how, on lying awake during the night, he had heard the infernal machinery in motion, and seen the walls of the cell slowly drawing together; and how he knew that the next day there would remain but one window, and that on the succeeding night the walls would be drawn gradually together, and crush him to death as they met.

Were his captors about to wreak their vengeance on him after this subtle fashion? Was some hidden and devilish mechanism then at work within the walls of that building?

He lay and listened intently.

No doubt about it now. He heard the softened but regular blows of some iron instrument piercing through the mortar of the wall immediately above the spot where his head had been; he heard the soft fall of the mortar; and after the space of a few minutes he half saw, half felt, the starting of a fissure in the surface of the wall, from the other side of which the noise clearly came, and felt some loosened plaster-work tumble on to his hands.

What could this mean? It could not be, as he in his disordered fancy had first imagined, the work of his enemies. There would have been no reason for them to act with the secrecy which evidently guided the unseen operator. No; it must be some one trying to effect his release. And with this thought Gilbert's heart bounded again in his bosom, and he once more listened, to be blessed by comfortings of hope.

Meanwhile the iron instrument continued to be plied manfully but softly; and in a little time so much progress had been made by the unseen worker, that Gilbert,

leaning down and groping with his finger, felt that a space of about three inches had been cleared away.

And now he knew that the crisis had come upon him. Was he to speak or be silent? If enemies were on the other side of the wall, by speaking he might show that he yet cherished the hope of escape, and might render them doubly alert to check the chances of any rescue which might yet be in store for him. If friends were there, by being silent he might lose the opportunity of informing them of his whereabouts, and aiding them in their endeavours for his safety.

He did not long hesitate. He was a desperate man, and knew that worse could scarce befall him than he had already gone through; so he took advantage of the next pause in the knocking, and stretching himself at full length on his pallet, placed his lips to the fissure and whispered,

‘Who is there?’

There was no reply.

After the lapse of a few minutes, Gilbert, finding that the work was not renewed, said in the same whispered tone,

‘If there is any one with the smallest feeling of humanity for a miserable man, who for weeks has been kept in close confinement unlawfully, and, so far as he knows, for no fault of his own, let them speak, for heaven’s sake; and even if they can be of no use, give him the comfort of hearing a human voice once more.’

Another pause, then a voice which Gilbert’s practised ear could tell was naturally gruff and harsh, but somewhat softened through weakness or illness, said,

‘Are you the gentleman they call Sir Gilbert?’

Gilbert started. It was as he thought. His friends

had discovered his prison, and were working to release him from it.

‘I am,’ said he joyously. ‘And you—you are some one employed by my friends, who have found out where I am, and have sent you to rescue me?’

‘Not I,’ said the voice; ‘I am a prisoner like yourself.’

At these words Gilbert fell back on the bed almost faint with despair.

The unseen man seemed to have guessed at the effect of his communication, for he said quickly,

‘Don’t be cast down by that. I am a prisoner, it is true; but prison-breaking is part of my business now; and I thought I was making my way out of this infernal place, until your voice showed me that I had made a mistake—that I had got to work on the wrong wall, and that I was breaking farther in, instead of, as I thought, making my way out. However, it is nothing to be downhearted upon; it is only delayed for a little while. I shall get to work upon the other wall to-morrow, and if it is as slack-built as this one, I promise you it won’t hold Sledgehammer Tom for a week longer.’

‘Are you called Sledgehammer Tom?’ whispered Gilbert.

‘That’s my name,’ said the voice.

‘And what are you?’

There was a pause, and then the voice said,

‘Well, I am a cracksman—what you gentlefolks call a burglar; at least I was: but I’m trying to do better now. For the last few weeks I have been looking after you, Sir Gilbert.’

‘Looking after me!’

‘I have seen you and talked to you.’

‘Within the last few weeks? Good heavens! where?’

‘You recollect the navvy who scaled the tree and spoke to you at the window of the lone house? I was he.’

‘Of course,’ said Sir Gilbert. ‘You had arranged to plan my escape, and then you basely deceived me. And yet you are here a prisoner like myself, you say; I cannot understand that.’

‘So you think I sold you,’ said the voice, ‘do you? Right you should have, sir. Every one’s at liberty to have a bad opinion of a fellow who acknowledges to being a cracksman, and who has led such a desperate life as I have; and I don’t know that I mightn’t have sold *you*; but I wouldn’t have played the lady false for all the gold in the Bank of England.’

‘The lady? Ah, you spoke of your being employed by her. Tell me, then, how it was your plot failed, and how you are here a prisoner like myself.’

Then Sledgehammer Tom detailed in his rough way how his intended plot had been balked; how Ikey Levy had been beforehand with him at the lone house, and carried off Sir Gilbert; and how finally they had wreaked their vengeance on him.

Gilbert listened with as much attention as he could command; but his weak state of body had left his mind unsettled and wandering, and he could not understand who the lady was who had so interested herself in his fate, and whom his unseen friend spoke of in such terms of devotion. He thought it was Dalilah, and tried to describe her to Tom; but though Tom admitted the correctness of the description, it was plain that she was not the person from whom he received his instructions, and whom he would only mention as ‘Miss Constance.’

‘So that is the long and short of the story,’ said Tom, when he had finished, ‘and I see pretty plain where we are. This is some crib of Ikey Levy’s finding out; and as they have got us both here, I expect they don’t intend to keep us very long, but try and smuggle us out of the country as soon as they can. Lor’ bless yer! games like that is nothing to Ikey Levy and his gang. With them, where there is a will there is a way; and they does pretty much as they like, and laughs at the police. But they forgot my old trade of a blacksmith when they put me in here, or they would not have left so many bits of rusty iron and copper-sheeting about the place. This is only the second night I have been at this wall, and you see I am through already. Now I find my mistake, I shall go at the other one to-morrow night; and if I find it in the same condition as this one, it won’t be long before I pull myself out of this mess; and once I’m out, another four-and-twenty hours sees you free, Sir Gilbert. Now the day is breaking, and that infernal boy—who is as knowing as the whole lot of ’em put together; don’t you try ever to make friends with him, for he’s a bad un, and will split at once—will be about presently, and we had better shut-up. To-night, if all goes well, we’ll have another jaw. By the way, do as I do; take your mattress, or sacking, or whatever you have got there, and pull it up so as to hide this crack. He’s got sharp eyes, that boy; but he ain’t a cat, and I’ll defy him to see in this pitch dark.’

Then Sir Gilbert, upon whose weak frame this excitement had already begun to tell, after thanking Providence for the ray of hope which had been thus vouchsafed to him, stretched himself out on his mattress, and fell into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IMPENDING.

THE servants in the Little House in Piccadilly had begun to notice a great change in their mistress.

At this autumnal season of the year, Dalilah, like all the rest of the gay and giddy throng of fashion, was accustomed to leave London; and though from her position it was of course impossible for her to be received in any of the country-houses of her male friends, there were scores of places where she could enjoy herself in any way she chose.

Sometimes her fancy was for the sea-side. Then she would have a lovely villa in the neighbourhood of Cowes, commanding extensive views, and then would hold high festival, to which all the leading members of the various yacht-clubs would be bidden. For a fortnight or three weeks she would remain there, going out for expeditions of two or three days on board one or other of the largest yachts, queen of the vessel, her word law, her every command obeyed.

Or it might suit her to go to Scarborough, whither her horses would be transported, and where she would ride on the sands and walk on the spa, and excite the admiration of the men by her beauty, and the jealousy of the women by the magnificence of her toilettes.

Sometimes she chose to go on the Continent, where she would travel like a princess, with a courier in advance to make all the arrangements for her at the places where she intended to stay. Spa, Baden, and Homburg were the watering-places which she most frequented; and there it was she would live in unparalleled luxury, and in a state which not even the greatest of Russian princesses or the most extravagant of Parisian lorettes could excel.

She did not much like travelling in England; it was too quiet and dull for her; but her movements greatly depended upon the wishes or engagements of whoever ruled her fancy for the time being.

This year, however, her servants noticed with extreme astonishment that, although the season had drawn to an end, and everybody was rapidly leaving town, there seemed no intention on their mistress's part of going away from home. Usually, long before this, her milliners had been kept in a state of the greatest excitement selecting and preparing her travelling costume, and all the household had to some extent been affected by the coming change. But this year the time went on, and July wore itself into August, and yet there were no signs of departure.

Mademoiselle Natalie, the lady's maid, was very much astonished at this. She had, however, the usual cleverness of her class, and concluded that her mistress was only waiting to learn the destination of Baron Albert Schwarzburg, who still remained in town, before deciding upon her own movements.

One morning, however, Mademoiselle Natalie found she was wrong.

She always made it her business to obtain whatever

information she wanted through the medium of her ears, which, placed at keyholes and the other crevices of doors, had often rendered her good service.

On this occasion, when Baron Schwarzberg came to call upon her mistress, Mademoiselle Natalie, after ushering him into the boudoir, placed herself immediately outside and heard the conversation between them.

From this she learned that the Baron was about to start immediately for Germany, and most eagerly urged Dalilah to accompany him. This, notwithstanding all his entreaties, she unhesitatingly refused to do. She would give no reason, however much he pressed her; she spoke frankly and kindly to him; she said she had no reason to be dissatisfied with him, and indeed that she liked him as well as any of the people surrounding her, and appreciated all the kindness he had lavished on her.

When he urged his jealousy, she only smiled, and said that she could assure him that there was no actual tangible person towards whom he need entertain that feeling. If he had occasion to be jealous at all, it was of a phantom, a something past and gone, never to return. Such was not an object to arouse in him any extraordinary feeling, was it? As she said this she tried to smile again, but broke down in the attempt and burst into tears.

Baron Alfred Schwarzberg was very much upset at this conduct of Dalilah. He loved her truly, not merely for his own selfish ends, but with a warm and true feeling rarely lavished on persons in her position. He tried to console her, telling her that she was out of health, and that absence from town and change of scene were

more than ever necessary for her now that he saw her condition, as they would tend to take away her thoughts from the melancholy object on which it was evident she had allowed them to dwell, and renew not merely her bodily but her mental health.

But still Dalilah said No. She confessed indeed that mentally she was very much broken down. She had suffered, she could not explain why or how, but she had gone through a great deal of mental excitement, and it had told upon her; perhaps soon it might come to an end; it would come to an end, she felt convinced of that.

And then she laid her hand lightly but earnestly upon Albert Schwarzberg's, and looking into his eyes told him she felt convinced that some great calamity was impending over her. What it was she could not say; but the feeling was so strong that it impelled her to tell him she had a presentiment that this was the last time they would ever meet on earth, and to bid him a long farewell.

Albert Schwarzberg was very much moved. He wished Dalilah to consult the most eminent physician of the day, but she refused. He thought pecuniary embarrassment might be the cause of her trouble, and offered to place an unlimited sum of money at her disposal; but in reply she only smiled feebly, and unlocking her casket pointed to a large roll of bank-notes lying therein. Finally, the Baron took his departure grieved and troubled in mind, after having made Dalilah promise to write to him should she require his presence, when he would at once hurry back to her, wherever he might be.

The revelations which Mademoiselle Natalie thus

overheard very much disturbed that young woman. She was not particularly attached to her mistress, but she had a very good place with large wages and many valuable perquisites, and looked on the idea of losing it with anything but satisfaction.

She felt convinced in her own mind that her mistress was extremely wrong in remaining moping in London, always horrible, but now more horrible than ever, when she could have had the opportunity of going abroad accompanied by so desirable a cavalier as Baron Schwarzberg. As to this nonsense which she talked of something hanging over her which impelled her to say good-bye to the Baron, then to talk as though her days were coming to an end, Mademoiselle Natalie laughed that to scorn. That was, she said to herself, merely the result of spleen, the disease to which the natives of these islands are peculiarly liable.

But still, with a foresight which had often stood her in good stead during her lifetime, and which she always cultivated, the French waiting-woman did not neglect to make such disposal of her mistress's wardrobe as would enable her to pack it up and hie away with it, should occasion so determine her movements.

There was no chance, however, of Dalilah's taking any notice of the movements of her abigail. What she had said to Albert Schwarzberg was simply the truth, although she did not confess to him the reason of her being plunged into such a state of profound melancholy and depression.

The truth was, that in all the love-affairs in which she had been engaged during her brief but bright career, she had never suffered her heart to become interested, or at all events to obtain the mastery over her judgment,

until she made the acquaintance of Gilbert Montacute. Those few days of wild delirium, when she was in the habit of seeing him, formed the brightest spot in her chequered career—the one period to which she could look back and have her reminiscences tarnished by no blot.

When Gilbert was ruthlessly torn away from her she felt as though she would have died, had she not had the excitement of endeavouring to rescue him from the forced captivity into which her quick apprehension told her he had been hurried, either by Prince Polonia himself, or by the machinations of some of his accomplices. So long as that exciting chase was going on, so long as she, to a certain extent, had confidence in the industry and energy of Bloxam, she felt nerved-up to encounter whatever might come.

But now, although the detective had not failed to assure her that the game was by no means hopeless, and that there were yet chances of his discovering the new retreat into which the unfortunate man had been hurried, Dalilah's spirits had sunk within her, and she refused to be comforted by the assurance.

Not that she distrusted Bloxam, not that she even despaired of Gilbert Montacute being restored to his friends; but she felt that for herself all was over, that her brilliant and brief career was about to terminate, and that she should fade out of that world in which for the last few years she had played so conspicuous a part, and leave no trace behind her. The feeling of her approaching end was so strong upon her, that she had not even sufficient energy to nourish a desire that vengeance might be wreaked on Prince Polonia, the author of all her overwhelming misery. Or rather, be it said, when

the idea came into her mind she chased it away, **wishing** to pass away in peace and charity with all men.

So she remained in London when the other stars of fashion had departed from it.

Daily she went for long rides, not now, indeed, in the deserted Park, but in the fresh suburbs, where the corn was being cut, and where the sun-tanned reapers would pause at their work, and, shading their eyes with their hands, gaze after the unwonted apparition of the lady beautifully mounted surveying them and their homely toil.

Not, indeed, that she saw them.

The corn and the reapers, the smile of the golden landscape illumined by the afternoon sun, lay before Dalilah's eyes, but she saw them not. She went on her way purposeless, chewing the cud of her own reflections, ever revolving in herself that one question, When will it end—when will it end?

One afternoon, on her return, she found Bloxam awaiting her. The detective's face looked bright, and he advanced towards her with an eager step and cheerful air.

‘You have news?’ she asked.

‘Yes, madam, good news, and no likelihood of falling into any trap, or making any such mistake as that made on the last occasion.’

‘I am glad to hear it,’ she said; but said it so drearily and so evidently without much care, that Bloxam felt bound to answer:

‘You don't believe it, madam; and it is natural you should not, after that confounded failure. But this time I think there is no doubt about it. Before twelve o'clock to-morrow night Sir Gilbert Montacute shall be free to go where he likes, or I'll forfeit my reputation.’

‘You know where he is?’ asked Dalilah.

‘Yes, ma’am, we have discovered that it is as bad a place as any one, let alone a gentleman of his quality, would desire to be kept in. You must not be surprised if he don’t look up to the mark, and seems rather peeky and sallow-like, when you see him, for the place is enough to grind the soul out of a man, let alone the short commons and other hard lines which I have no doubt these ruffians have given him. But he will be out of it to-morrow, and it will be his own fault if he ever gets into it again. One thing I guarantee—if ever he is taken, it will be by a different gang, for to-morrow night sees me break up Ikey Levy’s lot, and work out poor Tom Bentley’s revenge, as sure as my name’s Bloxam.’

The detective went on to tell her how, on that following night at midnight, he had learned that it was intended to smuggle Sir Gilbert and another man who is devoted to his interest from the place in which they were confined, and to take them away to the riverside, where a boat would be lying to convey them to a ship which had been chartered for their transport to some foreign country. How, after a great deal of trouble, the police had obtained evidence of these facts, and a strong force would be sent down, not merely to rescue Sir Gilbert, but to effect the capture of the principal members of the gang, who would doubtless be there, and who were ‘wanted’ for some most serious crime which they had committed.

Dalilah listened apparently with apathy. When the detective had concluded, she said,

‘I believe you perfectly, and I look forward to the success of your attempt. If there is no positive objec-

tion, I should much like to be present when the rescue takes place. I should like my form to be the first on which his eyes rest ; I should like his to be the last on which I shall ever look.'

The last words were uttered in so low a tone as to be inaudible by the detective ; but he had heard the first sentence, and he replied,

' Scarcely a place for women ; but I know your courage, madam, and the interest you have taken in this matter ; and if you care particularly to be present, there is no reason why you should not be. One of my men shall call for you about eleven o'clock, and if you trust yourself implicitly to his guidance, he will convey you to the scene.'

About the time this conversation was going on, General Brailsford was closeted with Sir Gerald Griffin at Whitehall.

The two veterans had been having a long and anxious conversation.

' This is a most extraordinary request you make, my old friend,' said Sir Gerald, ' and one which in any other case I should not have the slightest hesitation in at once refusing. But knowing as I do your dear daughter's pluck and determination, and attributing to the case all the importance with which you invest it, I am disposed to give way.'

' I can assure you, my dear Griffin,' said General Brailsford, ' I only repeat the physician's words : " If Miss Brailsford is checked in carrying out this object, on which she has apparently set her heart, I will not answer for the result." I myself have endeavoured to argue with her, pointing out to her that neither the

time nor place are fitted for an invalid whose strength can yet scarcely be considered regained—that the circumstances are very likely to produce a painful excitement, calculated to bring on a relapse; but she still sticks to her point. “I must be there”—that is all she says—“I must be there;” and therefore I have come to you to see if it can be managed.’

‘Your Constance is my girl’s most intimate friend, and my own peculiar pet,’ said Sir Gerald; ‘and I am not the man to say No where her welfare is in question; and though it will be rather an important matter, and will lead to the breaking-up of as notorious a nest of scoundrels as has existed in London during my commissionership, there will be no positive danger, and therefore she shall go.’

He touched a spring-bell which stood beside him, and said to the man who answered it,

‘Let me see Sergeant Bloxam as soon as he arrives. Tell Superintendent Poole to be ready with four picked men of the Shadwell reserve at ten o’clock to-morrow night, and await my orders.’

On the officer’s retiring, Sir Gerald turned to his friend and said,

‘Now, Brailsford, Constance will have a proper protection. Send down here to-morrow morning, and you will receive exact information what is to be done.’

‘You don’t mind my being of the party, I hope?’ said the General. ‘I should not like Constance to go without me; and I have other reasons.’

‘My dear Brailsford,’ said Sir Gerald, slapping him on the back, ‘an old soldier like you can always be made available in any case of outpost or skirmishing duty.’

CHAPTER XXXIX.

RELEASED.

ALL the next day after his muttered colloquy with the mysterious unknown, Gilbert remained in the darkness and in silence, and without any farther communication from his friend.

The boy came in and out with his food according to his wont; but Gilbert had followed the advice given him on the preceding evening, and had so arranged his mattress as to preclude any possibility of the orifice being seen even by that lynx-eyed youth.

All day long in total silence and comparative darkness.

At length came the welcome night; and Gilbert, lying upon his couch, heard not indeed the strong knocking noise of the previous evening, but a feeble scratching, that was evidently intended to attract his attention.

He removed the mattress from the aperture, and bending down and placing his mouth to it, whispered,

‘Are you there?’

‘I am indeed,’ whispered the same voice which had spoken to him on the previous evening, only now Gilbert fancied much fainter and less distinct. ‘I am indeed,’

it said ; ' but it's a mercy I am here to tell you that I have had a bad accident, and I fear all our chances of escape are hopeless.'

' Good heavens !' groaned Gilbert ; ' is the cup of happiness again to be dashed away from my lips ? Tell me what has happened now.'

' I told you, when I discovered my mistake last night, and found I had been working at the wrong wall, that I should transfer my attentions to the other side of this infernal den, and try to make as good an impression on the stone and mortar there as I had done here. Well, I went to work this morning, when I thought all was quiet, and made some little progress ; but the stones were a different quality from that which they have used in this wall, and I was obliged to put out a deal more strength to make my mark upon it. While I was at it, just hitting a tremendous blow, the cursed iron slipped, and went bang through my hand, making a great hole, out of which the blood flowed like from a pump. I can't say I fainted—I don't imagine I am womanish enough for that—but I went right off my head, and lay there for some minutes, I suppose ; and when I came round to myself I found my hand warn't no good at all, and that I must give up trying to use it for a day or two. But that ain't the worst of it. As I was lying there, when my senses first came back to me—I was too weak through loss of blood to pick myself up, and I could only lie and wait till I got stronger—I heard a talking outside the wall, but my head was so wool-gathering that I couldn't exactly make out what it was ; but I have a notion, from putting this and that together, that there is mischief in store for you or me, or both of us, and that they are going to take

us out of this infernal place, and put us into one which we shall find much worse.'

'God help us!' groaned Sir Gilbert; 'how did you hear of this?'

'Bit by bit, and by putting this and that together in the muddled state in which I was,' said his unknown friend; 'I feel pretty certain of it, though I can't explain clearly how I came to know it. There was some talk, I think, about the ship; and if I am right, and we're in the hands of the people who I expect have got hold of us, that is a bad look-out indeed.'

'The ship!' cried Sir Gilbert; 'are we to be taken abroad?'

'You have just hit it, and to a very nasty abroad indeed,' said the voice; 'if taking us abroad don't mean knocking us on the head as soon as we get into mid-channel, and sending us overboard with a big shot chained to our feet.'

'So much the better,' said Gilbert; 'I should welcome that, for it would be short and speedy; any thing is better than lingering out one's life in this horrible captivity.'

'There you are right,' said the voice; 'but we don't know yet what may turn up, or how we may be treated. Hist! I hear them outside; now silence—don't speak again.'

The aperture was closed up on the other side, and Gilbert, taking the hint given him by his friend, lay down on his pallet and remained perfectly silent.

There he lay for the space of, as he imagined, two or three hours, until he judged it was the dead of night.

He had fallen into an uneasy slumber, from which

he was aroused by the unwonted sight of a light. This light he found came from a candle which was carried by a heavy-faced man whom he had not previously seen. The man in rough tones bade him get up and follow him, at the same time pointing to the shining muzzle of a pistol which was projecting from his pocket, and significantly telling him to make no noise.

Gilbert obeyed mechanically.

The man placed him in front of him, and bade him proceed onwards.

Gilbert walked out of the door through which the boy had been in the habit of entering, and found himself in a kind of paved court open to the air. There was a small group of men in one corner, in the centre of which stood a burly figure, which he recognised as that of the navvy who had attempted his rescue from the lone house. This man's hands were tied together with ropes behind his back, while a louring ruffian grasped him tightly by the collar.

An old man, dressed in a long coat reaching to his heels, came forward, and bowing to Gilbert with mock politeness, said,

'I hope I see you well, sir. Sorry to make your acquaintance under unfavourable circumstances ; but better now than not at all. We hear your health has suffered from the confinement in which your friends thought it necessary to place you ; so in order to set you up again, we're going to give you a change of air and a sea voyage, my dear—a sea voyage ; that always does one good. And you ain't going alone, either. Here's a friend of yours ; he shall go with you. You are so fond of each other, it would be a pity to separate you ; and though we were compelled to interrupt that

little arrangement which you had planned so nicely together, we are not so rude as to wish to keep you apart for long ; so you shall go now together, and I wish you a very pleasant voyage.'

The old man bowed grotesquely and rejoined the group ; then, after a word from him, a man detached himself from the rest, quietly opened a gate in the wall, and after peering out returned, nodded his head to notify that all was secure, and motioned them to come out.

The man who had his hand on Tom's collar, and who was no other than Devil Dick, was the first to move, who gave his prisoner a vicious wrench, and dragged him onwards ; then came the Jew and two or three others ; then Sir Gilbert and the man who had brought him from his cell ; and then the man who had looked out of the gate, and who came last and closed it after him.

A shrill and sharp whirring noise of a dozen rattles, a rush, a spring, a heaving of a vast mass to and fro, the sound of quick thudding blows, a roar of blasphemy, followed by a faint low cheer,—and all was over. The Jimmy gang were in the hands of the police.

'And as neat a job as ever I jobbed,' said Bloxam, looking at the party composing it. 'This will be a bad business for most of you, but a tucking-up matter for you, Devil Dick, and you too, Mr. Ikey Levy, I'm thinking. What! you laugh, do you? I don't mean for this kidnapping, though that's bad enough ; but remember Tom Bentley!'

'Ah, I thought you would change colour when I mentioned him. When I saw poor Tom's body brought into the dead-house from Greenhithe, and I knew whose

work it had been, I swore over it I would be revenged of it on you. And so I will.'

'And I too,' cried Devil Dick, 'on him who sold us!'

Then, with a superhuman effort, he wrenched himself out of the grasp of the man who held him, and drawing a knife, sprang forward and made a tremendous blow at Sledgehammer Tom.

It fell not on him for whom it was intended, but on the lithe and quivering form of Dalilah, who had sprung forward and thrown herself across Tom's breast.

A cry of horror burst from Gilbert, from Constance, and the General, who were standing by; and even the police, accustomed to dreadful sights, could scarcely refrain from expressing sympathy.

Constance flung herself by Dalilah's side, and with her own handkerchief tried vainly to stanch the blood, which was slowly welling from a large wound in the unfortunate girl's breast.

'It is of no use, sweet lady,' said Dalilah, opening her eyes and gazing with a look of gratitude upon the girl kneeling by her side; 'no surgeon's art could heal this wound. I know I have received my death-blow. I had a presentiment that my days were numbered, and now I know that I was right.'

'You must not talk in that way, my dear young lady,' said the General, advancing and kneeling by his daughter's side—'you must not. Why, good heavens! what is this?' he exclaimed, as he looked from one of the girls to the other, and perceived the extraordinary resemblance between them.

'You notice the likeness, General,' said Gilbert in his ear. 'It is indeed wonderful, and explains a mystery which up to this time I found impenetrable.'

‘This is no chance resemblance,’ said the General, looking very solemn. ‘Tell me,’ whispered he, bending over Dalilah, ‘do you recollect your parents?’

‘No,’ replied she faintly, ‘I never saw them.’

‘Where were you brought up?’

‘In Yorkshire.’

‘At Staithes?’

‘Yes. Why do you ask?’

To the astonishment of all, the General bent down and pressed his lips on the dying girl’s forehead.

‘My child,’ said he, ‘it is your father who now embraces you.—Yes, Constance, this is your sister, my natural child, born just before I made your mother’s acquaintance. I strove to hide the result of an intrigue which I had when quartered with my regiment at York, and paid some honest fisher-people to rear the child as their own. And now my sin comes back upon me, for I find her in this fearful state.’

And the General covered his face with his hands and burst into tears.

‘Do not weep for me, father,’ said Dalilah. ‘My life has been such that it is better it should end now.—Sister,’ she said, turning to Constance and taking her hand, ‘I die happy, for I see you and Gilbert brought together at last. He only thought of me because of my resemblance to you.—Gilbert, come here.’

He approached, and knelt by her side. She took his hand, and placing Constance’s hand within it, said feebly, ‘Heaven bless you both!’ then fell back dead.

Devil Dick and Ikey Levy were hanged at Newgate for the murder of Sergeant Bentley; so Bloxam kept

his oath, and carried out the revenge which he had sworn over the body of his dead comrade.

The fact that Prince Polonia had contrived Sir Gilbert's abduction, though not noised abroad, was privately communicated to his sovereign; the consequence being that he was recalled in disgrace, and died shortly afterwards, a blighted miserable man.

Gilbert and Constance were married. They live principally abroad, and are perfectly happy. But whenever they come to England they stay with the General, who is still alive. And on these occasions they never omit to pay a visit to a plain granite tombstone in old Richmond churchyard, on which is engraved one word—

DALILAH.

THE END.

PUBLISHED AT SEVEN SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE.

Now offered at HALF-A-CROWN.

MIRTH:

A

Miscellany of Wit and Humour,

CONTAINING INTERESTING

TALES, SKETCHES, & POEMS,

By the following renowned Authors:

James Robinson Planché.

George Augustus Sala.

John Hollingshead.

Archibald Gore.

H. S. Leigh.

Clement Scott.

Evelyn Jerrold.

H. J. Byron.

E. L. Blanchard.

R. Reece.

W. S. Gilbert.

Francis H. Emery.

Godfrey Turner.

London: CHARLES HENRY CLARKE,
7 Gough Square, Fleet Street.

IMPORTANT NOTICE.

An entirely NEW AND UNIFORM EDITION of the following

POPULAR WORKS

has just been issued. Post 8vo, Picture Boards.

Price Two Shillings each.

**GOOD PAPER, GOOD PRINTING, GOOD
BINDING, AND ATTRACTIVE WRAPPERS.**

ANONYMA ; or Fair but Frail.

SKITTLES : a Tale of Female Life and Adventure.

ANNIE ; or the Life of a Lady's Maid.

LEFT HER HOME ; or a Tale of Female Life and Adventure.

KATE HAMILTON : an Autobiography.

AGNES WILLOUGHBY : a Tale of Love, Marriage, and Adventure.

INCOGNITA : a Tale of Love and Passion.

THE LADY DETECTIVE, The Experiences of.

THE BEAUTIFUL DEMON.

SKITTLES IN PARIS : a Biography of a "Fascinating Woman."

THE SOILED DOVE : a Biography of a Pretty Young Lady.

LOVE FROLICS OF A YOUNG SCAMP

FORMOSA ; or the Life of a Beautiful Woman.

DELILAH ; or the Little House in Piccadilly.

THE LADY WITH THE CAMELLIAS. By ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

PARIS LIFE AT TWENTY. By ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

London : CHARLES HENRY CLARKE,

7 Gough Square, Fleet Street.

(Late 3 Warwick Lane and 13 Paternoster Row.)

W. STEPHENS HAYWARD'S NOVELS

*Now ready, NEW AND UNIFORM EDITION, post 8vo,
Picture Boards.*

Price Two Shillings each.

THE BLACK ANGEL.

THE STAR OF THE SOUTH.

THE FIERY CROSS.

THE REBEL PRIVATEER.

THE MUTINY OF THE THUNDER.

THE GOLDEN REEF ; or a Dive for Half a Million.

THE IDOL'S EYE ; or Strange Adventures in Search of a Big
Diamond.

TOM HOLT'S LOG : a Tale of the Deep Sea.

WILD AND WONDERFUL.

THE DEMONS OF THE SEA.

RAN AWAY FROM HOME.

RODNEY RAY ; or Life and Adventures of a Scapegrace.

LOVE AND ADVENTURE.

THE CLOUD KING ; or Up in the Air and Down in the Sea.

LOVE'S TREASON ; or the Vendetta and the Avenger.

MILDRED'S CROSS ; or the High Road to Ruin.

ROBERT THE ROVER (just ready).

ANDREW LORIMER (just ready).

ONE IN A THOUSAND (just ready).

SECRETS OF A PRIVATE INQUIRY OFFICE.

LORD SCATTERBRAIN, OR THE ROUGH DIAMOND

POLISHED : a Sequel to "Handy Andy," by SAMUEL LOVER.

London : CHARLES HENRY OLARKE,

7 Gough Square, Fleet Street.

(Late 3 Warwick Lane and 13 Paternoster Row.)

KEATING'S POWDER

**KILLS BUGS,
FLEAS,
BEETLES,
MOTHS.**

This Powder is quite harmless to animal life, but is unrivalled in destroying Fleas, Bugs, Beetles, Moths in Furs, and every species of Insect. Sold by all Chemists, in Tins, 6d., 1s., and 2s. 6d. each.

Avoid worthless imitations! Ask for "KEATING'S POWDER," and take no other, and then you will not be disappointed.

KEATING'S COUGH LOZENGES

Contain no Opium, Morphia, nor any violent drug. It is the most effective remedy known to the Medical Profession in the Cure of COUGHS, ASTHMA, BRONCHITIS. One Lozenge alone relieves; one or two at bed-time ensure rest when troubled by the throat. They are invaluable to take to Church or Public Meetings, being so handy in the pocket.

Sold in Tins, 1s. 1½d.

NURSE EDDA'S WONDERFUL BABY SOOTHER

This unequalled remedy is entirely free from any Opiates or noxious or strong, active Medicine; its effect is instant in relieving Infants from GRIPES, WIND, COLIC, &c. It is guaranteed a simple, harmless Medicine. No one in charge of a Baby should be without it; have it ready in the house.

Price 1s per Bottle, at all Chemists, or sent free for that amount from THOMAS KEATING, Chemist, St. Paul's London.

KEATING'S WORM TABLETS.

A PURELY VEGETABLE SWEETMEAT, both in appearance and taste, furnishing a most agreeable method of administering the only certain remedy for INTESTINAL or THREAD WORMS. It is a perfectly safe and mild preparation, and is especially adapted for Children.

Sold by all Druggists, in Tins, at 1s. 1½d. and 2s. 9d.; or free by post for 15 or 36 stamps from THOMAS KEATING Chemist, London.

